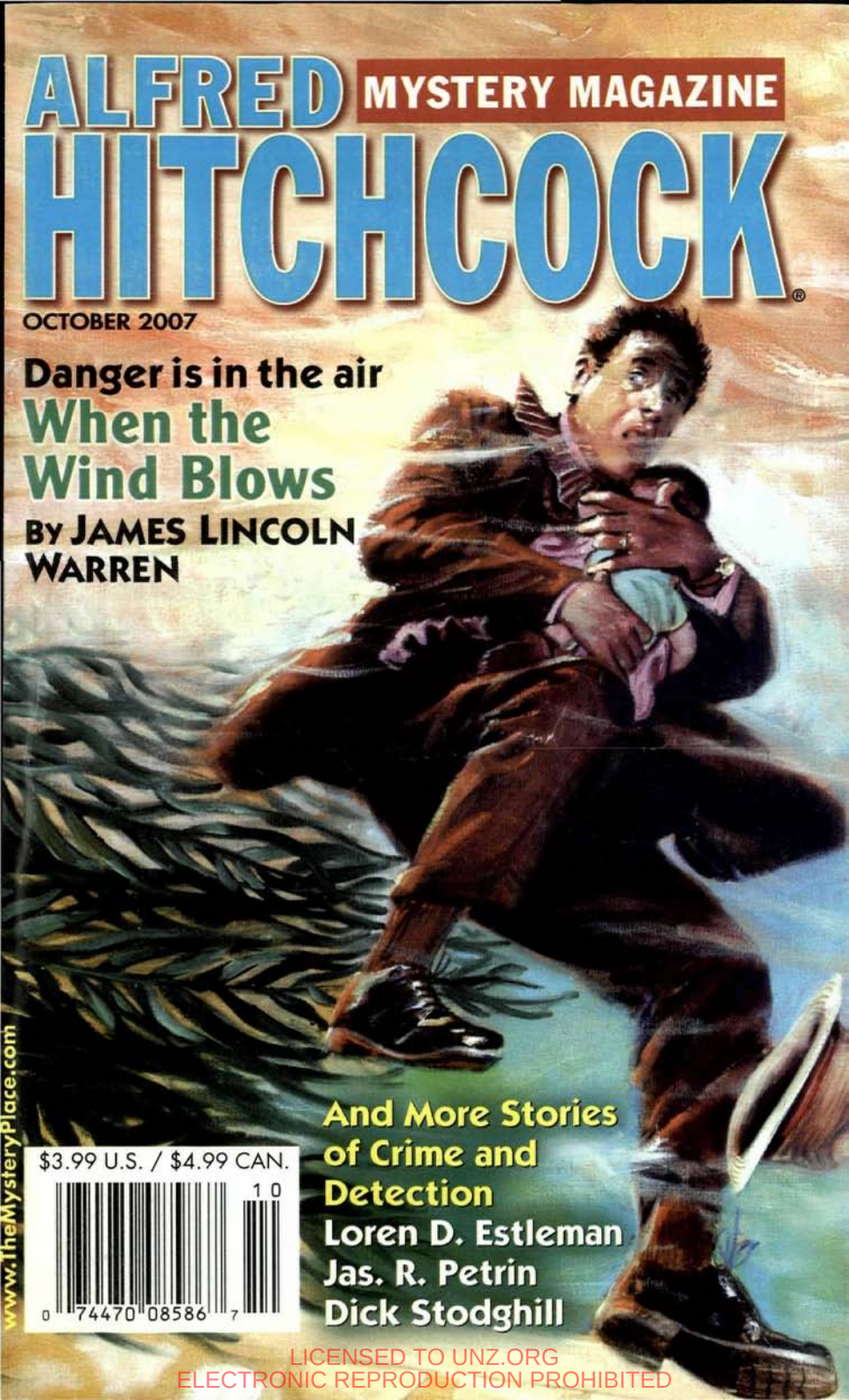
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EDITOR'S NOTES

LINDA LANDRIGAN

CELEBRATIONS

First cause for celebration: We are delighted to report that Toni L. P. Kelner's story "Sleeping with the Plush" (AHMM, May 2006) won the Agatha Award for Best Short Story at the annual Malice Domestic convention in May. It was, as usual, a well-run and enjoyable meeting. Congratulations to Toni and to all the winners.

Lovers of mystery short stories will find another cause to celebrate with the launch of a new blog, Criminal Brief: The Mystery Short Story Web Log Project, which features a rotating cast of writers and critics offering their reflections on the short story genre. We encourage you to visit and even post a comment or two. Criminal Brief (www.criminalbrief.com) is the brainchild of James Lincoln Warren, author of this month's cover story. Mr. Warren is familiar to AHMM readers for his series featuring eighteenth-century "indagator" Alan Treviscoe, but "When the Wind Blows" is a dark, contemporary tale through which California's hot Santa Ana winds snake like a musical motif.

The arrival of a new voice is always cause for celebration, and this month AHMM welcomes Frank T. Wydra, author of the gritty procedural "Street Justice." Mr. Wydra is the author of the 1992 thriller, *The Cure*, published by Dell, and has contributed stories to our sister magazine EQMM, as well. He lives in Michigan, just outside of Detroit.

We also welcome the return of Birney Dibble, author of "Too Cold a Trail." A retired surgeon, Dr. Dibble's first story for AHMM, "Peace to Her Bitter Bones," appeared in the December 2001 issue. Both stories reach back to solve mysteries from the past while exploring human emotions in the present.

Our celebratory mood is enhanced by a Depression-era historical featuring Akron, Ohio P.I. Jack Eddy and young reporter Bram Geary in "The Survivor of the Storms" by Dick Stodghill; Loren D. Estleman's "Needle," a tightly told tale of evil and misfortune compounded over decades and played out on the back porch of a Detroit bungalow; "A Sign of Peace," a tale of miscues in a church in the Portuguese-American community of Fall River, Massachusetts, by James T. Shannon; and a story by Bruce Graham called "Either Way" in which a crime-fighting team finds a way to snare a killer and make it stick in court. Our Mystery Classic this month is Marie Belloc Lowndes's "The Lodger," capturing the fear that once gripped London. Plus we have top-notch reviews by Robert C. Hahn of some recent private eye novels in our Booked & Printed feature and an in-depth look at a new sequel to the seventies hit *Death Wish* in Steve Hockensmith's Reel Crime column.

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THE GOLDEN RULE

JAS. R. PETRIN

"See, here's what makes me mad," Benny said, dropping the fanned-out *Chronicle Herald* he was reading onto the bar and reaching for his Moosehead beer.

"What is it this time?" Beemer said. He was leaning against the wall beside the till with his arms crossed, one eye on two young kids who had just come into the Rob Roy, maybe for their first legal beer, taking a booth in the corner and acting as if they were in the school cafeteria, lots of whispering, smirking, and grinning.

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean there's always something making you mad. If it was me, I wouldn't even read the newspaper, it gets you so worked up."

"Well, there's lots to get mad about."

"That's a fact."

"Here's a guy lands a top job with the Lotteries, okay? He's in it six months, he gets the sack. Reason? They claim—the other big shots do—that they can't get along with the guy. Now comes the kicker. Terms of his contract, he gets a severance package worth more than what he would've got if he'd stayed there another year and a half annoying people. Next day he's out golfing with the guys he couldn't get along with. Jeez! What's wrong with this picture!"

"That's how they work things," Beemer said. "Those big shots. Help each other out. You didn't know that?"

Beemer is still watching the two kids out of the side of his neck. One of them has his head and shoulders down low, up to something. The other one is so red in the face with suppressed laughter, he looks like he's having a heart attack.

"What I see," Benny says, "is a guy dipping nearly two hundred grand out of the trough and walking away with it. Perfectly legal. It was in his contract. Another guy, no contract, jacks fifty bucks, he's a crook."

"It's the golden rule," Beemer said. "When you got the gold, you make the rules, an' the most important one is this: whatever happens, you don't owe anybody; somebody always owes you." He

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plucked something from his pocket. "I'm gonna get some of that. Look."

He set a Pinball ticket on the bar.

Benny glanced at it.

"Yeah, so?"

"Fifty thousand dollar winner."

Benny's eyes narrowed. "You haven't even scratched it yet."

"I know that."

"But you said it's a winner."

"That's right. I know for a fact it is."

Benny went back to his newspaper. "You been smoking something."

"No. Listen. I heard about it on TV, okay? This guy on *Jay Leno*. How you can make good things happen by believing you can. I'm trying out his method. That's how I know I got the grand prize here." He slipped the ticket back in his pocket.

"You're nuts," Benny said.

"We'll see."

"So when are you gonna scratch it?"

"When I feel really strong that the moment has come. 'Scuse me a minute."

Beemer disappeared into the back and after some bumping around emerged with a plastic pail of sudsy water and an industrial-sized scrub brush. He stepped around the end of the bar, crossed to the table where the two kids were sitting, and plunked the pail down in front of them. He slapped the brush on the table.

"Okay, Picasso," he said to the kid who'd had his head and shoulders down, "now comes the fun part. You scrub that crap off the table you scribbled there, or you buy the table off me for six bills."

All the fun drained out of the two kids. They looked as if they'd been slapped. The one who'd had his head and shoulders down scowled, trying to save face. "No way this table's worth six hunnerd bucks."

"It's worth whatever I can get for it," Beemer said. "Market economy." Then louder, over his shoulder, "Hey, Benny, what can I get for this table?"

"I'd give you six bills," Benny said, not bothering to turn around. "More if it was clean."

"There," said Benny. "See? Now you got to outbid him, go maybe six-fifty, seven. Or start scrubbing."

The other kid spoke up. "You can't make him do that!"

Beemer looked at him. "I get it. You're his lawyer. You want to help him out. But that's okay, I got another bucket back there for you. Buddy here's not going anywhere till the table's clean or I got the money, okay?"

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The second kid began to say something, thought better of it, and went out the door.

Beemer stared into the first kid's face, the kid staring back, taking in Beemer's bent nose, owly eyes, his big, veined, hairy arms. When he picked up the brush and started scrubbing, Beemer moved back behind the bar. "Looks like," he said to Benny, "it's not for sale after all."

"Story of my life," Benny said. "I never get any breaks. I should've probably listened to Stevie Sweet when he calls me up the other day."

"Stevie Sweet? What does he want?"

The street door opened and a chubby little man put his head into the room.

"Looks like we're going to find out," Benny said.

If Stevie Sweet wasn't an albino, he was pretty much the next thing to it. Pale as a baby. He was bald, his eyes a mystery behind horn-rimmed mafias. He had a cherubic chubbiness. He wore a gray, lightweight summer suit, a Windsor knot in his tie, and had a briefcase under his arm. He looked like a businessman. Which is what he was.

He stopped just inside the door and took a good look around before toddling forward. He set his briefcase down beside Benny, then heaved himself up onto a bar stool.

"Gimme an Ace-High soda," he told Beemer.

Beemer winked. "You know where I can get any of that?"

"Oh yeah," Sweet said. "I forgot. They don't make it anymore."

"Not for, what is it—a hunnerd years?"

"Guess I'll have a scotch rocks, then."

"Makes sense to me," Beemer said, reaching for the bar scotch.

"An' don't push that crap my way. Give me the Glen Breton," Sweet said. "A double hit." He glanced sideways, up at Benny. "I been tryin' to get ahold of you."

"I figured," Benny said. "I see your name come up there on the calling line display."

"You seen it? Then why don't you call back?"

"I've been busy," Benny said, "staying out of trouble."

"A quick two grand is trouble?"

Beemer glanced up from the drink he was making. He put in the ice, poured, put a stick in the glass, and set the glass in front of Sweet, who took the stick out and dropped it on the bar.

"First one today," Sweet said, raising the glass to his pouting lips and emptying it. Setting the glass back down, he said, "Better fix me another one, unless you got some of that Ace-High kicking around."

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Beemer put the bottle of Glen Breton on the bar.

"What about the two grand?" he said, pouring. "Maybe I can help you out, seeing Benny here's got so much to do."

Sweet took a cautious sip this time from his glass.

"Not much to it," he said. "Just a courier job."

"Oh yeah?"

"That's right. A shipment of cards coming up from Bar Harbor tomorrow. Comes up once a week, only my regular guy's got the flu."

"What kind of cards?"

"What do you care? Business cards."

"Some business cards," Benny said. "Must be gold leaf."

"I got to call them something, don't I?"

"You can call them what you like," Beemer said. "What's the deal?"

Sweet took another careful glance around. His gaze lingered a moment on the scowling kid scrubbing away at the tabletop. Then he said, "Printer's in Bar Harbor. Customer here, out in Liverpool, puts in a regular order. Once every week he sells maybe five, six thousand units. Got a route, the whole south shore, then up, around into the valley."

"Must be a busy boy," Beemer said. He spoke out louder, harsher, at the kid in the corner: "Okay, Picasso, you can go! My advice, next time you're in the dollar store, get the markers that come off easier. Save yourself some trouble."

The kid went out, his face purple, slamming the door behind him.

"What was that about?" Sweet asked.

"Budding artist," Benny said.

"Yeah? Maybe I could use him." Sweet resettled himself on the stool. "What it is, there's a small sports bag has to be taken off a boat out past the pilot station. I won't tell you there's nothing to it. Sometimes the weather's not too good. Wasn't for that, I'd do it myself."

"Well, let's see," Beemer said. "A guy'd need a boat, the fuel, another guy who knows the rocks out there—"

"What is it?" Sweet said. "You want me to cover expenses?" He shook his head sadly. "Help is so hard to get these days."

"I'm in," Benny said. "Cash up front? The two grand?"

It wasn't cash up front, but they figured Sweet was good for it. And they got him up to twenty-five hundred, the extra five for the guy with the boat.

"You're sure he knows the water out there?" Benny said, pushing his shoulders higher under his jacket, trying to keep warm. They could see the Devil's Island light as it came and went, came and went, out there in the darkness.

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"If he don't, nobody does," Beemer said. "He's been going out to meet boats his whole life, and his old man was doing it before him. People call him the Lobsterman."

"Oh, so he fishes, does he?"

"No."

They were waiting under the bluffs below York Redoubt for the guy, every few minutes Benny moving down right close to the edge of the water, trying to see around the curve of the shore, and then a cold wind rising off the ocean, sending him scurrying back up under the trees each time. A freighter plodded by, heading for the harbor, a splash of lights moving sedately along in the darkness, a low rumble of diesels.

"Maybe that's our delivery right there," Benny fretted. "Maybe we missed it."

"Will you stop worrying?" Beemer flicked his cigarette end out over the water. "You're starting to make me antsy."

"The wind's picking up, that's all. It could get ugly out there."

"It's always ugly out there, you ask me," Beemer said. "That's why I run a bar and not a lobster boat."

"Then why are we here?"

"A quick grand? Why not? I could've done it without you—still can, for that matter—and took the two grand for myself."

"Why didn't you, then?"

"That's what I'm asking myself." Beemer straightened and began to move down the slope. "Here he comes. Right on time."

The boat was a Cape Islander, maybe thirty feet long, red and green running lights showing, and that was all. It moved in cautiously until it stood its own length from the shore. They couldn't make out her name in the dark.

"Now what?" Benny said.

Beemer grunted. "You tell me."

An arm came out of the back of the cabin, beckoning to them.

"We're s'posed to wade out there?"

"Looks like it. I guess he can't come in any closer. I never thought of that. Jeez!"

Benny was wearing ankle-high hiking shoes, rugged grips on the bottoms; Beemer his usual black loafers. They made it to the boat, water swirling around their knees, and clambered aboard, the Lobsterman in his ropy sweater helping them up over the side.

"I was you, I would've waited up there aways," he jerked his thumb. "I could've come right in, no problem a'tall."

"Nobody told us," Benny said, wringing water out of his socks.

"I was you, I would've took my shoes off."

"Who asked you?" Beemer said.

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They got underway, moving across the outer harbor, the swells bigger here, lifting the boat, tilting her, then dropping her in the troughs. A fog was beginning to rise.

"I think I'm gonna be sick," Benny said.

"Oh good," Beemer said and glared at him. Benny, a gentle green color, went to the other side of the boat.

"How far is it out to the pilot station?" Beemer asked, addressing the back of the Lobsterman's head through the open cabin door.

"Not far." The Lobsterman's voice trailed back at him over the engine's continuous *poc-poc-poc.* "Not far a'tall."

"I don't want to be late."

"You won't be late. You won't be late a'tall."

"If we're late, I can't pay you."

"Well, we *could* be late. An' there's the fuel, y' know."

"Just don't be late, that's all," Beemer said.

And then suddenly, there she was, a big black mass pushing out of the fog. She had slowed right down. Benny squelched up to them in his wet shoes. He wasn't green anymore, just sort of gray. "I'll go in red to red," the Lobsterman told them, nodding at his red running light. "Count of the wind. They'll drop her down to us."

"Have you done this before?" Benny asked.

The Lobsterman glanced at him, a blank. "Done what before?"

It wasn't a sports bag but a small suitcase let down on a rope by an unseen hand, and the Lobsterman grabbed it, untied it in seconds, and handed it over to Beemer. A minute later they were moving away again, the big ship quickly falling astern.

Beemer led the way down into the cuddy, a small table down there between two bunks. He switched on a lamp. "See what we got," he said. There were two locks. Beemer got out his penknife.

"Careful you don't rag those," Benny said, "or it won't shut right after."

"I know what I'm doing."

In a moment the suitcase was open, the lid thrown back. The contents were done up in bundles carefully wrapped in thin paper, held together with rubber bands, another bunch or two shoved in loose to pack the top inch or two for a firm fit. They were Pinball tickets. Beemer grunted. He scooped up one of the loose ones. He closed the case and set it on the floor.

"Business cards," he said. "Sure."

"He has to call them something."

"Right."

Benny took the ticket, held it to the light. "You know what,

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though? It looks pretty good. That printer in Bar Harbor must know what he's doing." He glanced at Beemer. "Got that ticket you had this morning?"

"The fifty thousand winner? Absolutely."

Beemer reached inside his jacket to his shirt pocket and brought out the pristine ticket he had showed Benny earlier. Benny took it from him, laid it on the table, and placed Sweet's ticket alongside it.

"Beauty. Can't tell the difference." He glanced up. "But what's the spin? You can't make much. It would be like running off five dollar bills."

"Sure, but he does this once a week, don't forget," Beemer said. "How it works, his customers already sell these things. Grocery stores, bars, filling stations. Approved vendors, right? They keep these special jobs under the counter, mix them in as they go. Difference is, when they sell these ones they get to keep the whole five bucks."

"They're perfect," Benny said, moving the two tickets around on the table, comparing them. "Absolutely perfect."

"Easier to make than money. You don't need the special paper, an' they don't have all those anticounterfeiting gimmicks. One problem, they got a shelf life. Only good for a week. Which explains why he needed us out here, he couldn't hang loose until his guy got better."

They heard the engine throttling down.

"Almost there," Beemer said. He reached down for the suitcase, brought it up to the tabletop, the lid dropped open and the loose-packed tickets fell out.

"Scheisse!" Beemer said. Benny helping, they got the tickets back in the case and snapped it shut.

Then he put out his hand. "Give me my own ticket back."

Benny hesitated. There were still two tickets on the table, side by side.

"I'm just wondering, are these the two we were looking at?"

"You mean you don't know?"

"I'm not certain."

"You lost my ticket?"

"I didn't lose anything. It's right here." Benny pushed the tickets across the table.

"But which one's mine?"

"I don't know. You didn't mark it?"

"No, I didn't mark it! Why would I mark it? I only had the one—the fifty thousand dollar winner!"

"Well, if you'd marked it, then we'd know, wouldn't we?"

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Beemer scooped both tickets up and held them close to his eyes. "I can't tell them apart!" His voice tightening now.

"Why are you getting so excited?"

"I'm not getting excited!"

"You're yelling."

"WHY SHOULDN'T I YELL!"

They stared at each other. Benny took a deep, steadying breath.

"I told you, it isn't lost. It's right here in front of us. All's you do, you take and scratch them both. You're so sure you had the winner, the one with the fifty grand payout has to be yours."

The engines grumbled down to an idle.

Beemer put both tickets on the table in front of him. He took his penknife out, held it over them. Then he lowered it again.

"I can't do it."

"Why not?"

"What if one of them *is* the winner?"

"What if? You're not so sure now?"

"Listen to me!" Beemer looked at the tickets again. "If one of them is the winner, I'd have to kill myself. First you, an' then me."

"Why?"

"Because I won't be able to claim it! It could be Sweet's ticket. If it is, they're sure as hell not gonna honor it. They'll call in the ticket inspectors. The mounted police. An' if I can't claim it, then I don't wanna know."

He closed his eyes, clenched his teeth, and with an expression of exquisite agony, tore both tickets into shreds.

"Brutal," Benny said.

That wasn't the half of it. As they climbed awkwardly out of the boat and onto a rock, right up close to shore this time, the case fell open again and dumped its entire contents in the water. And it got better. Back at the Rob Roy, they found the front door slathered with an especially large unintelligible graffito, the white paint running down onto the street.

"Picasso," Beemer said. He made it sound like a swear word.

"Take the door off and save it till he's famous, cover expenses," Benny advised.

Stevie Sweet put his head in the door, looked carefully around, then stepped inside the Rob Roy. "Somebody tagged your door," he told Beemer.

"No kidding. How could I have missed that?"

Sweet was staring at the bloated suitcase before he even climbed up on the stool.

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"Okay, what happened?" he asked.

"You sure you want to know?" Beemer asked him.

"Some kinda screw-up, or what?"

"You could call it that," Benny said. "It fell in the water."

"It fell in the water," Sweet said, repeating the statement as though he couldn't quite get his mind around it. His eyes were inscrutable behind the dark glasses. "And how did that happen?"

"A little accident," Benny explained, "when we were climbing out of the boat down there.

Sweet glanced around. The place was empty. "You about ready to close?"

"Another ten minutes," Beemer said. "But yeah, I guess I could." He went to the door, locked it, came back to the bar, and shut the outside lights off.

"Just see what we got here," Sweet said. He brought out a key and reached for the swollen case. Beemer stopped him. "The money first," he said.

Sweet hesitated. They could see him struggling with it. He let out a rasping sound and then brought out the money. Peeled it off in hundreds, two piles of ten on the bar, another pile of five. Beemer passed Benny his share, pocketed his own, then pushed the case at Sweet.

Sweet fitted the key in one of the locks, felt around with it, and his lips tightened. "Somebody jimmied this."

"Somebody in Bar Harbor, maybe," Beemer said.

"You'd lie to your mother, too, wouldn't you?"

He turned the key in the second lock, and the lid bulged upward pretty much by itself. Sweet threw it all the way back. "Jesus," he said.

Each bundle of tickets had swelled to the size of a paperback novel. The thin paper had split. The ink had run. The elastic bands had pulled through the soggy cards, nearly cutting each of the bundles in two.

"What am I supposed to do with this?" Sweet demanded.

"If it was me," Beemer said, "I know what I'd do. I'd toss the whole damn mess in the dumpster out back."

"Thirty grand," Sweet said, "you'd toss it in the trash?"

"What else you gonna do with it?"

"Well," Sweet said, "you can do that yourself, I guess, soon as you write me a check for what you ruined here."

"Don't hold your breath," Beemer said, "on that one."

Sweet's voice tightened up. "You expect me to eat it? Thirty large?"

"Business loss," Beemer said. "Like when I drop a case of champagne out back."

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"What're you talking about! Don't give me that!" Sweet was losing control now, his voice getting shrill. "The champagne you sell here, I can buy Windex for what it costs. An' you don't pay nothing for breakage, the tops of the bottles still sealed, you get straight replacement. Who do you think you're talking to?"

"If I was you," Beemer said, "I'd calm down a little."

"Don't tell me to calm down! Write me a check and I'll calm down!"

"Actually," Beemer said, "you owe me."

"What?" Sweet looked apoplectic. His face turned as dark as his sunglasses. "I owe *you?*"

"That's right. See, you used an inferior product here. This suitcase. It fell open because it's so cheap. My own legit Pinball ticket, fifty-thousand-dollar prize, got mixed up with your crap. Now I can't redeem it."

"Why not?"

"Because on the off-chance it's one of yours, I had to throw it away. I couldn't risk it. I don't need no cops here poking round."

"You threw it away."

"That's right."

"You dummy. I don't have no winning tickets. Same reason. If one got brought in for a prize, they'd know right away, the Lotteries, an' I'd have walls around me the next six years."

Beemer stood there a minute behind the bar, jaw muscles working, eyes slowly narrowing. He looked at Benny. Benny shrugged.

"Now cut me a check," Sweet said. "I'm out thirty grand!"

Beemer reached under the bar, brought out his Al Capone bat with the big purple stains on it, and whacked it on the bar.

"I'm the one that's out. The fifty. You're only out printing costs for this pile of crap. I been around the block myself, you know!"

He glared at Sweet. Sweet glared at the bat.

"I think," Benny said, "if we look at it, what we got here is a draw."

Sweet continued to glare a moment longer, then slid off the barstool. He reached for the suitcase, struggled to close it but couldn't, swept the bulging thing under his arm, and stormed to the door. He fumbled with the lock there a minute, then slammed out into the street.

"A draw?" Beemer said, putting the bat away. "How do you figure that?"

"You both took a hit. Call it even."

Beemer said, "Even nothing. He owes me twenny grand, that skug."

"Now who's making the rules?" Benny said.

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NEEDLE

LOREN D. ESTLEMAN

The old man said his name was Doto. I don't know if it was short for something or if someone had hung it on him when he was a boy in Warsaw. There was no sign of it on his mail or in the string of names that appeared later with his picture in the paper or on local TV. For years I only spoke with him when the carrier put his mail in my box or I rescued his *Free Press* from a snowdrift.

When he came to my door it was spring, no snow for a week, and the mail hadn't run. I let him in and we sat down in the breakfast nook. I poured coffee from my second bucket of the morning.

My three-room hut stood on the Detroit side of the street facing his in Hamtramck, a suburb surrounded entirely by the city. The houses there resemble one another, not through the arbitrary vision of a designer of tract homes but because the people who built them had come from the same place and culture, and they had stood for most of the twentieth century, with an invisible line drawn between the Polish and Ukrainian neighborhoods by a sense-memory of Cossack wars. The cars in the driveways are held together by wire hangers and tape, but the lawns are cropped and the houses repainted every five years.

"Your coffee is strong, Mr. Walker. How do you sleep?"

"At night I cut it with bourbon. Would you like milk?"

"I would like bourbon."

I got the bottle down from the cabinet and topped off our cups. He put both hands around his and inhaled the fumes. He was in his seventies, with a low center of gravity and small features set out generously to take up space on his broad face. He needed a shave. His forearms were thick, and where a white thermal cuff was turned back over a plaid sleeve, the last two digits of a faded blue tattooed number showed.

He saw me looking and tugged down the cuff as if to hide a stain. "Treblinka," he said. "I was nine when I came. Nine hundred when I left. The odd thing is I remember best the way the needle stung like red ants."

I said nothing, which started the flow. He made no more mention

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of the Nazi concentration camp, but I found out about his two wives, one dead of fever during the crossing to America, the other dead of cancer twenty years ago. He'd worked at the Dodge Main plant until it was torn down in a conspiracy involving Mayor Young of Detroit, the Hamtramck city council, and General Motors to condemn the Poletown neighborhood for a Cadillac plant that was never built. I gathered he was some kind of artist who'd taken advantage of his enforced retirement to open a shop in Detroit, where he'd sold his work exclusively, but he'd retired from that as well and lived on Social Security. He had no children, and his silence on any other blood relations suggested they'd disappeared in the ovens of Treblinka and Auschwitz.

The Polish are emotional as a rule, not ashamed to shed tears in healthy bales, but he spoke in an even tone and his face never cracked. I didn't know the why of it, or why me, but he was old and alone and I hadn't anything pressing at the office, so I sipped and listened. The lost-diamond season was over, it was too early for stolen racehorses, and the credit-check business had gone the way of the dot-com bubble. Anyway, I was alone, too, and not young.

Then he surprised me.

"You are a detective?" he asked.

I nodded. "Private."

"What means private?"

"It means I work for one person at a time and pay my own hospital bills."

"It sounds expensive."

"So's health insurance."

"How much do you charge?"

When I told him, his face didn't change, but an opaque shadow slid across his wintry blue eyes.

"What do you need done?" I asked. "On simple jobs I charge by the hour."

He seemed to brighten at that. He slid off the seat, apologizing for not touching a drop of his spiked coffee. "I have good vodka at home," he said, "not that Stalin's piss they make in Russia."

"It's a little early for me. I was only joining you to be polite."

"You can be polite across the street."

It was as close to a command as I'd heard from him, in the tone he'd probably used as a foreman at Dodge. We went across the street.

He unlocked his front door and led me through a small, overstuffed living room, a dining room with piles of books and newspapers on the table, and a spotless kitchen, each stacked behind

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the other like plant rooms in a greenhouse. We stepped out onto a screened back porch, where I caught a puckery whiff of a stench I'd never liked. A twelve-gauge Remington shotgun leaned in a corner. It didn't mean anything. You don't have to register a shotgun in Michigan, and in Detroit it's the self-defense weapon of choice, as well as a handy noisemaker on New Year's Eve.

It didn't mean anything, except longtime Detroiters know better than to keep them in a place as easy to break into as a screened porch. Especially when there's a ragged hole gaping in the nylon screen on the outside door.

I stepped over and leaned down to sniff at the barrel. I felt older then.

He pulled open the door against the pressure of the spring. The body on the winterkilled grass was a pile of limbs in a dirty T-shirt, filthy and tattered jeans, and a pair of athletic shoes run down thin as paper at the heels. It lay facedown. I picked up the shotgun, holding it by the middle to avoid smearing prints, and straddled the body, one foot on the wooden stoop, the other on the ground, to reach down and grope for a pulse in the thick vein on the side of its neck. There wasn't any. The skin felt cool.

"I heard scratching," Doto said. "It sounded like an animal trying to get in. It was still dark. I came out with the gun. The light hit him from the kitchen. I don't remember even raising the gun."

I straightened. "How long ago?"

"Five. Five thirty, maybe. I waited for the police. I thought someone would hear the shot and call. When the sun came up and they didn't come, I waited another hour. Then I got dressed and went across the street."

I tried to remember if I'd heard anything that early in the morning. It's the tool of the town, as I said, and a night without a long bang somewhere is as rare as virgin timber. "Know him?" I asked.

"I didn't see his face too clear."

I like turning over dead bodies as well as the next guy, and the cops are specific on where they stand on rearranging the centerpiece; it's a union thing. But he'd come to me and told me his life story. No rigor yet, so I was able to turn the top half enough to see the face, patched purple where the blood had settled. The age surprised me; he looked seventeen or younger. His shaggy, dirty, fair hair had looked almost white from the back.

There was a mark on the right cheek that hadn't been made by post-mortem lividity. It was a swastika, etched delicately in turquoise-colored ink.

I told Doto he needed a lawyer, not a private detective, and he

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needed to call the police. They get woolly when you fail to report a gunshot corpse on day of issue.

"I can't afford a lawyer."

"The court will appoint one." I climbed back onto the porch, realized I was still holding the shotgun, and returned it to its corner. I'd seen there was a telephone in the living room, but I made him lead me to it.

"One question." I rested my hand on the receiver. "Did you see that swastika before you fired?"

"I don't remember. I told you, I don't even remember shooting."

"You might want to stick with that answer. The law's clear on defending yourself in your home with deadly force, but a hungry prosecutor can fog it up quicker than a doggie in the window. Right now your two best friends are that tattoo on your arm and the one on his cheek."

"I don't even know him."

"Better and better." I dialed 911.

The first uniforms on the scene were a sergeant and an officer, both black. The Hamtramck department used to be mostly Polish descent, but the established ethnic groups had been migrating to the suburbs since before we landed on the moon, leaving behind the senior citizens on fixed incomes and new faces from the Middle East and what remained of the Jim Crow South. The team took turns confirming there was a body, never leaving us alone on the porch. We could have skedaddled anytime after I made the call, but you can't fight procedure with logic.

The officer shooed Doto into the house to question him. The sergeant stayed with me.

"You move the shotgun?"

"It's where I found it."

"That isn't what I asked."

I said I'd taken it with me when I went out to look at the corpse.

"That's called tampering."

"I call it being considerate. Two carcasses mean double the paperwork for you guys."

"You said you've been neighbors for years."

"We didn't speak ten words to each other that whole time. He told me he shot the man. In those circumstances I wouldn't turn my back on my long-lost brother with the weapon in the room."

"Prints!"

"If he left any they're still on the pistol grip and the forepiece. I took it by the middle."

"You one of those private guys used to be a cop?"

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"I got in my thirty."

He lowered his lids. "You must've started young."

"Minutes. Not years."

"I got no time for this. I ought to put the bracelets on you for obstruction and interference."

"You've got as much time as it takes before the first squad shows up."

We got on like that until the plainclothes arrived, led by a lieutenant named Sandusky. He had short blond hair and the erect bearing of a Polish lancer, but the eyes in the fifty-year-old face were kind. He glanced at me a couple of times while the sergeant was reporting, then dismissed him and strolled over. He'd been to see the sight, which was now in the charge of the lab rats with their black metal cases.

"How long you live here, Walker?"

"Twenty-five years."

"It's not that big of a town. I'm surprised we never met."

"I live on the Detroit side. I've met plenty over there."

"So I heard. I checked you out with Thirteen Hundred. You've worn yourself quite a trough there."

Thirteen hundred is the street address of Detroit Police Headquarters on Beaubien. I said, "I'm taking a personal day today. Seems I can get into trouble even when I'm just doing the neighborly thing."

"Don't worry about Futterman. We call him Cop-a-tude downtown. I'd close this one today if they let me. My uncle survived the Warsaw ghetto. Best way to deal with these white supremacist pukes is to arm everyone who went through the Holocaust and put them on the scent."

"This kid's generation is barely aware we fought a war over there. Maybe he thought it was just a pretty tattoo."

"Same difference to a man like Doto. If I were his p.d., I wouldn't let a man or woman under seventy on the jury, and I'd try to smuggle in one or two with a concentration camp serial number on their arm. *If* he saw that swastika before he pulled off. He didn't seem sure."

"A man has a right to defend himself in his home if he feels threatened, whether it's by a Boy Scout or the Hitler Youth."

"Damn straight. He says the screen was hooked, and the techies found an open pocket knife when they turned the puke over; small for a weapon, but good for sticking between the door and the frame to slip the hook. But there's been a rash of accidental firearms deaths lately, and a lot of noise about keeping them out of civilian hands. The county prosecutor wants to be attorney

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general, the attorney general wants to be governor, and the governor wants to go to Washington."

"That's a lot of weight to put on the back of one little old man."

"Well, you saw what happened to the Detroit cops just for beating one rotten little recidivist to death with flashlights. We can't carry 'em that size anymore even here. Have to make do with guns and tasers and sap gloves and batons. We're going out there practically naked. What chance has a private citizen got?"

"Maybe the puke has a violent record."

"How can he not? That's not a Happy Face on his cheek."

The lieutenant cut me loose. Outside, Doto sat in the back of a police cruiser, staring through the grid separating him from the front seat. His head came barely level with the padded rest. He looked nine years old.

Sandusky's puke didn't have a violent record. He had almost no record at all, and the one he had told a story nearly as sad as Doto's.

His name was Ryan Lister. He was sixteen and, by all appearances, had been living on the street since his father had booted him out for not contributing to the household income. In February the manager of a Starbucks in Highland Park found him sleeping in a corner of the kitchen when he came in to open up, discovered the latch broken on the back door, and had him arrested for breaking and entering. He pleaded guilty to the lesser charge of illegal entry, spent six weeks in a juvenile detention center, and was released. That was the narrative on Lister's life of crime.

Doto's first lawyer, assigned by the public defender's office, stood up for him at his arraignment and was gone, replaced by an experienced criminal attorney retained by a Holocaust survivors' organization that had taken an interest in his case. When the prosecution proposed that Lister had merely sought shelter from the cold in Doto's house as he had in the Starbucks, the defense established that the temperature that night had not dropped below fifty, far warmer than on many of the nights the boy had slept in alleys.

Throughout the prosecution's part of the trial, the sides played badminton with the evidence:

—Surveillance records of all the area's known white supremacist groups contained no mention of Lister's ever having been a member or attended a meeting or rally;

—A medical examiner confirmed that the swastika had been tattooed on Lister's cheek quite recently—had not even had a

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chance to scab over—indicating that he was a new convert and therefore unknown to surveillance officers;

—Sergeant Futterman, one of the first Hamtramck police officers on the scene, testified that Doto had delayed reporting the shooting for more than two hours, suggesting the defendant had used the time to dress the scene and concoct his alibi;

—Amos Walker, neighbor, offered the defendant's explanation that he'd waited patiently for the police to arrive, expecting someone in his neighborhood to have called them to complain about hearing a shot. Yes, Doto hadn't been sure he'd seen the swastika, but under emotional pressure—(Objection; speculation).

And like that, back and forth.

The prosecution scored a hit when it seated a licensed psychotherapist whose sessions with Holocaust survivors had convinced him that the unremitting horror of life in the Nazi concentration camps had inured them to violence and human suffering, effectively turning them into psychopaths, without conscience or compunction about striking out against threateners real or perceived. In his opinion based on his research and interviews with the defendant, Doto had been a time bomb waiting for more than sixty years to explode.

The therapist's testimony infuriated groups representing survivors of Hitler's Final Solution, but the jury stirred and murmured and the judge tapped his gavel.

When the defense stepped up to bat, reporters speculated that a string of camp survivors would be called to confirm from their own experience that the sight alone of a swastika worn by an intruder was justifiable cause to act in one's own defense; disclosure records revealed that Doto's attorney had been interviewing dozens from the Polish community in Hamtramck alone with that purpose in mind. But he called only one witness.

On the stand, Doto answered questions calmly, recounting, with the startling clarity of an old man's memory of past traumas, his experiences as a Jew imprisoned in Treblinka. The litany of humiliations and abuses climaxed with an account of his separation from his parents and his younger sister, and the certainty later that they'd been killed in gas chambers, their ashes shoveled from ovens and deposited among those of thousands of others spread for miles around the camp. When the Allies liberated him in 1945, the ten-year-old boy had weighed less than forty pounds.

He broke down only once, weeping softly when he described his last meeting with his family. After a brief recess, he took the stand again and repeated what he had told me of the shooting, with one exception: He was now in no doubt that he'd seen the swastika

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before he fired. His own lawyer defused the prosecution's best cross-question by asking him why he'd told investigators he wasn't sure he'd seen it. He replied that he'd been too upset by the attempted break-in and his own action in response to remember the details clearly at the time. When the shock passed, his memory had returned.

Summations were brief. The prosecutor recapped the therapist's testimony and reminded the jury that the defendant had changed his story about seeing the tattoo. Counsel for the defense delivered an impassioned plea for a lifelong victim driven at last to a violent act to defend himself and his home.

The jury deliberated for two nerve-wracking hours. County residents were sympathetic to the homeless in those first weeks following a severe winter, and Ryan Lister's lack of a serious criminal record was troublesome. But in the end that swastika swept up the last holdout. Doto was acquitted.

I offered him a ride home. On the way he remembered that bottle of Polish vodka we hadn't cracked. He kept it in the freezing compartment of his refrigerator; the liquor smoked when he poured it and tasted like an ice-cold cloud.

When he left the living room to refill our glasses, I opened a large green cloth-bound album lying on the coffee table. Of course there were no pictures from his childhood, and either his first wife had never been photographed or her successor, who was probably the one who'd assembled the album, had left her out from natural jealousy, but there was a rich record of the couple's American life, with vintage cars and fashions and extinct Detroit-area landmarks throughout and vacations on the beach. Snapshots showed Doto in his Dodge coveralls with lunch pail; relaxing with friends around an old-fashioned beergarden table crowded with longnecks; retired at last from the daily scramble, posing proudly in the doorway of the shop where he'd peddled the product of his artistic talent downtown. I smiled in response to a grin I'd never seen on his face in person.

His remained; mine faded when I read the sign lettered on the plate-glass display window:

TATTOOS TO YOUR ORDER

I knew then, as clearly as if there was a picture there of the pole-axed expression on my face, how I'd come to be a part of it all. I'd helped bear witness to his uncertainty about the swastika on Lister's cheek, corroborating the testimony of the professionals on the scene. I'd done my part to saw a hole in the floor under the therapist's evidence on psychopathic behavior. Anyone can relate to shock. It's a human emotion after all, not the machinelike reac-

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tion of a cold-blooded killer. I'd been as useful a tool as the needle in the kit he'd hidden or destroyed after it had served its purpose. I could see him taking pains with his masterpiece, his last work, with no pesky resistance from his human canvas because it was incapable of flinching. Nevertheless, it required all his skill. It would have taken him every minute of the time before he called on me.

When I looked up from the album, Doto had returned. His face was as flat as paint. He set down our glasses, took it gently from my hands, closed it, and slid it onto a shelf packed with mementos of his life in Hamtramck.

THE MYSTERIOUS CIPHER
by Willie Rose

Each letter consistently represents another. The quotation is from a short mystery story. Arranging the answer letters in alphabetical order gives a clue to the title of the story.

KRD FXBD X ADP YMZTK XIB LJUDB IEL LE LRUIT EA PRE KRD PXK EJ PRKL RDJ AMLMJD RDOB. LRD YEEWD RDOGDB.

—FXJLUI OUFEI

CIPHER: _

ANSWER: A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

Solution on page 113

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WHEN THE WIND BLOWS

JAMES LINCOLN WARREN

Douglas Byrne stepped out of the unmarked Crown Vic and got slapped by the searing wind. It barreled down between the high-rise projects of Ocotillo Park like a freight train on a downgrade, whistling and twitching in the dark. Sweat prickled at Doug's temples, at the back of his head, on his upper lip under his mustache, and along the circumference of his stretch waistband.

So much for cool desert evenings, he thought. Welcome to the party in the oven, another hot night in the City of Antelope Valley. Another night in hell.

The streetlamps were too far apart and too dim to show much, and the light coming from the windows and doors of the projects cast a faint, jaundiced pall on the cracked concrete and graffiti-smeared stucco. The blinding red and blue beacons of the pair of patrol cars swirled in jarring syncopation, weirdly strobing and coloring the crowd on the sidewalk, paradoxically festive in the grave silence. The only sounds to be heard were the white noise of the gusting Santa Ana winds, the croaking and creaking of the swaying telephone poles, and the low murmurings of the patrol officers.

A uniform broke away from the crowd and approached him. At first Doug didn't recognize her, then realized he did know her but hadn't seen her for several weeks. He wondered why not. AVPD was small enough that most everybody knew everybody else. What was her name? Doug always had trouble with the young ones—Lizzie would've been about her age by now.

The officer stopped in front of him, her thumbs tucked in her belt in an unmistakable cop pose. He thought the uniform unflattering enough to women without their trying to look tough. The equipment belt overemphasized their hips. He smirked, aware that his own middle-aged spread would look pretty silly in patrol blues too. He'd look like some fat backwoods bubba, not that the City of Antelope Valley was any different from East Bejesus,

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Oklahoma, as far as being cosmopolitan was concerned. He remembered her name just in time.

"Hey, Ortega, where you been?" he asked jovially. "Long time no see."

Officer Laura Ortega's answer was curt. "Maternity leave."

"Oh. Yeah. Welcome back, I mean, congratulations," he said. "I remember now. A little girl, right?"

She nodded, her lips pursed.

All right. So she's pissed off at something. None of his business. "So what have we got?"

She looked away. Her voice trembled. "It's a baby dropped out of a sixth floor window." She covered her mouth with her hand. Her eyes were wide and moist. "Sorry. Sorry."

Jesus. His stomach lurched, but he kept it from showing in his voice or face.

"Did you say dropped? Or fell?" he asked, as gently as he could.

"I don't know," she said. "The mother, she's a speed freak and all strung out. Flores is with her now, waiting for you."

"Right. Why don't you see if you can get some statements? You can use my car." His car wasn't directly on top of the scene, like hers. He didn't want Ortega to have to look at the remains again. Hell, he wasn't sure he could take a look himself. He knew it would be like seeing Lizzie again.

The mother, a twenty-year-old blue- and red-eyed addict named Karlee Samms, would have been pretty if she weren't so emaciated. She refused to say anything, wouldn't even deny she had thrown her own four-month-old baby girl out the kitchen window. She would only hold on to her bony elbows and rock back and forth, staring wide eyed at the door of the interview room.

"Why did you do it?" Doug asked.

No reaction.

"Your neighbors said you had a fight with your boyfriend. Was it about Jazelle?"

Slow blink. "I don't got a boyfriend."

"Then who did you have the fight with?"

Shrug. "Nobody."

"So how'd you get that cut under your chin, then?"

"Accident. That's all."

He decided to change tack. "Jazelle was quite a handful, wasn't she?"

Karlee's eyes misted but quickly dried up, and she resumed rocking.

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"Karlee. Look at me. What made you do such a thing?"

Karlee stopped, tensed up, and stared at him, panic in her bloodshot eyes, then opened her mouth, made a kind of choking noise, and then only rocked faster.

She wouldn't talk to the court psychiatrist, either, beyond telling him she wouldn't talk to him. She wouldn't even talk to the public defender. Karlee eventually stopped rocking, but she continued to be withdrawn and uncommunicative. Separated from the other women at the jail for her own safety, she was put on suicide watch, though she never made an attempt at killing herself, not so much as a gesture.

Karlee Samms was booked for second degree murder.

Doug didn't sleep too well that night. He woke several times. He kept dreaming he could hear crying in the next room.

Karlee was still in custody a month later when the next baby fell to its death.

It wasn't the same part of town. Jazelle Samms had died in a housing project. Sebastian Loeb, five months old, had fallen from the third story balcony of an upscale condo in a gated community called Villa Escondido. It was a commuter neighborhood, inhabited by bank managers, lawyers, and stockbrokers who rode the Metrorail to their L.A. offices on weekdays.

But the same desiccating wind was back, brushing Doug's skin like hot ash, tugging at him as if it were trying to tear out his spirit. Maybe it was the wind that made him dizzy, but the vertigo only came when he thought about the kid.

The street was much better lit here, but the blue and red rotating lights still glowed in the gloom like hellfire. The crowd might have been better dressed than the one in Ocotillo Park, but it loitered just as ghoulishly.

And Ortega was the first officer on the scene.

This time her pose was less brave. This time she hadn't been able to hold back the tears. Doug knew she was thinking about her own infant at home with her husband. He wanted to send her home, but she refused.

"I'm a cop," she said, scowling, her pride offended. "This is my job."

"All right," he replied. "You know what I want. Where are the parents?"

"They're not here."

"Then where the hell are they?" He heard the unwanted edge in his voice and felt a twinge of shame. He started again, this time more gently: "I mean, do we have any idea where they are?"

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Laura Ortega shrugged. "The neighbors say Steve, that's the husband, he travels a lot. He could be anywhere. The wife is missing."

"What do you mean, *missing?*" He knew he sounded like a complete jerk. Even this late at night, Doug saw her blush under her olive complexion. Why was he bullying her like this?

"It's what they said, Detective. I don't know what they meant. I think maybe you better talk to them yourself."

The neighbors weren't much help. The Loebs were typical of the neighborhood and well liked. Jordan Loeb, whose reputation was so wholesome she'd been a Rose Court Princess in Pasadena as a teenager, had been seen that afternoon, dressed in workout clothes as if she were returning from the gym, lifting Sebastian out of the child restraint in the back seat of her silver Mercedes-Benz station wagon. The car was missing, but nobody had seen it driven away.

On a hunch, Doug asked if anybody had overheard anything like a quarrel coming from the Loebs' unit that night. He wasn't surprised that no one had. Villa Escondido had much thicker walls than Ocotillo Park.

There was still no sign of the Mercedes, but making it disappear was a simple matter of driving it down to L.A., where such cars were as common as freckles on a redhead, and where chop shops did business on every other corner. Doug was sure they'd never see it again.

Jordan Loeb, though, turned up a week later in a Lancaster motel. Or rather, most of her did, minus her brains and the top of her skull. The note only asked Jesus and Steve to forgive her for being such a coward. She'd used her husband's gun, a Smith and Wesson .40 caliber semi-auto pistol he'd stupidly kept loaded by the bed for purposes of "home security," and fired a semijacketed hollowpoint directly through her palate.

Deaths in Antelope Valley, even murders, rarely got mentioned in the *Los Angeles Times,* but Jazelle Samms's tragic death had earned a five-line summary in the "In Brief" column of the California section the month before. Jordan, it seemed, had cut out the article. It was found in her personal NIV Study Bible, near the front, bookmarking Genesis 22, the passage describing Abram's attempted human sacrifice of his son Isaac.

Doug learned from Steve Loeb's sister, Eunice Stein, that Mrs. Loeb had not converted to her husband's faith but had instead hooked up with a charismatic Christian sect operating out of a storefront church. Eunice claimed that Jordan had, in fact, grown steadily and more morbidly religious over the last several months. Apparently this had led to severe family tension. Jordan and Steve

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had fought bitterly about Sebastian's future religious instruction, until they were almost not talking to each other at all.

The consensus was she'd read about the death of the Samms girl, and in her unhinged state she had seen it as a sign from God, instructing her to offer her own child as a sacrifice. The psychiatrist who examined Karlee suggested that Jordan expected God to miraculously deliver Sebastian from death, then copiously reward her faith. Her subsequent guilt over the child's death had driven her to suicide. Well, whatever had really happened, Doug didn't want to think about it. The last thing he needed was another case of night sweats.

The case was closed. Life settled down to normal. Burglaries, meth labs, convenience store robberies, a parking lot homicide following a barroom brawl. Normal stuff.

Until the wind kicked up again.

Doug desperately tried to prevent his chili bacon cheeseburger from disintegrating in his hands and spilling all over the blotter on his desk as the phone rang. He managed to put the sandwich down on the bag it had arrived in before it completely slid apart. He licked some errant chili off his right hand and reluctantly picked up the receiver. Probably his wife. Holly always managed to catch him when he was eating something he shouldn't.

"Detective Bureau. Byrne."

"Hi." A woman's voice, but not Holly's. He couldn't place it.

"Can I help you?"

"Oh sorry, Detective. This is Officer Ortega."

"Right. What can I do for you, Officer?"

"I was just wondering, like, if you found any connection between Karlee Samms and Jordan Loeb. You know, because they both . . . they both did the same thing."

"You mean besides the newspaper clipping in the Bible? No. Why do you ask?"

"No reason. I mean, I was just sitting here at home thinking about it, and I guess I just wanted to know. But if there's no connection, well, that's that. You're the detective."

"That's right. I am. And both cases are closed. What's this all about, Officer?"

He could hear her fidget on the other end, hesitating. "Nothing. It's just—never mind. Some weather, huh? Thanks for your time. Bye."

She hung up, leaving Doug a little bewildered. *Some weather, huh?* The windows rattled with the smoldering surges of the Santa Ana.

The phone rang again. This time it *was* Holly, and she was angry

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out of all proportion—she'd found the Tupperware box with his lunch of celery and carrot sticks still in the fridge. You'd think she'd caught him with another woman. *Stop treating me like I'm a baby or something,* he mentally screamed, not daring to speak out loud.

It's the wind, he decided. This wind drove everybody crazy.

The thought gave him a strange chill.

Did Ortega know something he didn't? Maybe he'd better take another look at the files.

An hour later, he'd found it. Staring right back at him.

Jazelle Samms and Sebastian Loeb had the same birthday, March twenty-fourth. They'd been delivered at the same hospital, Antelope Valley Memorial. That was no surprise, since most of the kids in Antelope Valley were born there, but just the same, two coincidences too many.

He pulled the tattered AVPD social directory out of his desk drawer and looked up Ortega's home number.

A man answered. "Hello."

"This is Detective Doug Byrne at AVPD. You must be Laura's husband, Leo, right?"

"Yeah, that's me. Why you calling? Has something happened to Laura?" Leo sounded unusually calm if that were the case.

"No, I was just wondering if I could speak with her, that's all."

"Well, she's not here."

"I just got off the phone with her. She said she was at home."

"Then you should try her there."

"I'm sorry, I thought—I didn't know you were separated."

"Ever since Rosa died," Leo said, and this time the bitterness in his voice was unmistakable.

"Rosa?" Doug felt a little disoriented.

"Our baby. Rosa died and Laura split. You want Laura's number? I got it here somewhere."

"When—?"

"Been four months. What's it to you, anyway?"

Four months—just before the Samms baby's fall. Doug's mouth was dry. "Listen, Mr. Ortega, this might be important. What's Rosa's birthday? And where was she born?"

"Why do you want to know?" Leo asked, his voice suddenly sharp with suspicion.

"I said it might be important. Isn't that enough?" Doug snapped.

"All right, all right! She was born on March twenty-fourth. At Memorial Hospital. What's this all about?"

"Give me Laura's number. Please. It's probably nothing, but I really need to talk with her."

She wasn't home. He got the answering machine.

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Doug looked out of the window at the flying dust and failing light and felt angry and hopeless.

The wind must be making him slow witted. Of course Ortega wasn't at home—she'd be going on shift. He stood up and jogged down the hall to roll call.

It should have been obvious from the start. She was always the first on the scene. Always. Damn. It hadn't been the mothers at all. It had been Ortega all along.

How had she kept the women from talking?

He ran into the assembly room, puffing from exertion, but too late. All he saw was the desk sergeant giving him a puzzled look. Waving him off, Doug loped off as fast as he could manage toward the garage, only to see the last of the departing cruisers disappear down the street.

Now what?

Go to the dispatcher and recall her. She couldn't ignore that, could she?

But Captain Craig would want to know why. Not to mention IAD.

He stood in the twilit parking lot, panting, his hands on his knees, feeling sick. Why hurry? What was he worried about? She wasn't brazen enough to try it again, not tonight, not after she'd tipped her hand to him, was she? He had plenty of time, didn't he?

For the second time, a chill flared across his body despite the arid heat. Maybe he was coming down with something. He stood erect and slowly walked back inside to talk to the captain.

When Doug Byrne finished his piece, Captain Tyler Craig looked at him as if he were nuts.

"You're claiming a female officer, one of our own, one with an impeccable record, is—is murdering babies," Craig said.

"Look at the evidence, sir—"

"What evidence?"

"The birthdays. The hospital. The fact that she was always already on the scene when backup arrived. The fact that she lost her own kid just before it all started. It goes way beyond coincidence, and you know it. Maybe she snapped when her own baby died and decided for some reason the others shouldn't live either, or something. I don't know how or why, but she's involved somehow."

Craig frowned. "Just so this isn't personal, Byrne."

Doug reddened. "What the hell is that supposed to mean? *Sir.*"

"I mean I still remember how your own baby daughter died twenty years ago."

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Doug blinked hard. Lizzie. Oh God. Lizzie had been killed by a young woman too.

Child Protective Services first suspected Holly. Because Doug was a cop, it was sensational news. Life became sheer torture, TV reporters everywhere, microphones thrust in their faces like lances, video cameras shamelessly glaring at them behind the actinic lights. Later, when it became clear that the au pair had shaken the child to death in a diseased rage, things had calmed down, but not near enough, and not fast enough. The guilty nanny was a plump little blonde from Holland, but now, trying to remember her face, Doug could only imagine Laura Ortega's.

"That has nothing to do with anything," he said, trying to contain his fury. "We caught the girl who did it. Bea van Doorn. She spent seven years in prison before she was deported. Anyway, I'm a better detective than that."

"Are you?" Craig didn't look convinced. After a beat, he shrugged. "All right. Let's get Ortega in here and ask her about it. But one of you might be out a career when we're done." Craig flipped a switch on his intercom and instructed the dispatcher to recall Ortega. "You know, Byrne, little Rosa Ortega wasn't killed in a fall. She died of a congenital birth defect."

"You knew she was dead?"

"Of course I knew. How is that you didn't?"

The intercom buzzed.

The dispatcher's voice sounded embarrassed. "Uh, sir, sorry, but Officer Ortega says she can't comply right now. She says she's sorry, but she can't. Says there's something she's got to do first."

Craig and Doug locked eyes.

"Get her twenty," Craig snapped, "and get my car ready to roll. We'll reel Officer Ortega in, by God. No damn officer of mine is going to disobey a direct summons."

Ortega, surprisingly, didn't balk at reporting she was at Blanchard and Sixth. She also reported that she was leaving her unit.

Buckingham Court, a seventies-vintage apartment complex stacked three floors high and built of painted pine and concrete, comprised eighty-seven one- and two-bedroom units, all accessible from the outside. It was the sort of place designed to appeal to singles, financially modest couples, and newlyweds. Ground floor units had tiny patios or direct access to courtyards. The others had shallow balconies.

Doug spent the time getting there on his cell phone talking to the hospital. When he was at last connected to the administrator,

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he had a fight on his hands, but eventually he got the data he was after.

"Carol Kim, twenty-four, single, gave birth to a little boy, Austin, last March twenty-fourth. She lives in apartment 114 at Buckingham Court," he told Craig. "That's the target victim, has to be. I think we'd better get some backup, sir."

"One fourteen? That's on the ground floor," Craig said.

"Yeah. I don't think they'll stay there."

The captain's car pulled up to the curb right behind Ortega's parked cruiser, and Doug leaped out. The hellish breath of the Santa Ana engulfed him again. Perspiration broke out all over his body, but he couldn't let it slow him.

It took him a few minutes to find Carol Kim's place. The front door, open and swaying with each gust, faced a swimming pool glowing coolly blue with underwater lighting. Not a good place to have a baby, he thought—what if it gets out and falls into the pool and drowns?

The lights were on inside the apartment, but there was no one there.

He ignored the flashing backup units arriving and humped up the stairs two at a time. Without even thinking, he had drawn his gun.

The stairs terminated on the third floor. The apartments there were dark and locked. But a ladder built into the wall on the landing was clearly marked ROOF ACCESS.

He holstered his pistol and climbed up, feeling like he might explode from the sweltering heat. The Windsor knot of his tie tightened like a slipknot in a silk rope.

Finally, he was up. The roof was flat with a tar and crushed rock surface, punctuated with individual central AC units, barely visible in the dark, feeding the residences below. The wind was stronger here, more menacing. It was challenging Doug to remain standing.

He heard the crunch of shoes hurrying away to his left, just audible over the serpent hiss of the wind. He pulled out his gun and followed the footsteps as well as he could run.

He was about to shout out to Ortega when he suddenly tripped over something soft and solid in the dark. The hard fall punched out his breath, and he lost the grip on his pistol, cutting his hands on the sharp little shards of stone. He heard the gun skid away and drop off the roof.

His head turned to the left and he saw what he'd tripped over. Ortega, prone and unconscious. Alive, judging from her shallow breathing, but she had a scalp wound and was bleeding profusely. In the dim light, her blood seemed blacker than her hair.

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The Kim woman must have fought back. Doug felt a surge of relief. Maybe he wasn't too late after all. He got to his knees. Then froze.

Limned against the lumen of the lights below, he saw two people standing together on the eaves, a man and a woman. The woman—Carol Kim?—clutched something to her breast. It could've been a baby. It *was* a baby. The man brandished a bowie knife at least sixteen inches long.

Doug wouldn't have been able to hear the man over the wind if he hadn't been shouting. His voice sounded faint and distant, like the ravings of a ghost.

Even so, there was something weirdly familiar about it.

"The cub must be thrown away! I've explained it. The wind wants him because only the issue of the alpha male is allowed to survive in the pride. So you just drop him now—it's the easiest way. He won't feel anything, trust me. Or else you can watch me kill him, but then I'll have to kill you, too, for being unfit—that's the hard way, so don't make me do it like that. I've explained it."

Doug couldn't quite make out the woman's reply, but it might have been, "You'll have to kill me first!" He was on his feet.

The man grabbed her by the hair and jerked her head back, the knife glistening against her throat.

"Now hold him over the abyss," he instructed. "No? Here's a little nick." He sliced a shallow wound just below her jaw. Blood trickled down her neck.

The woman began sobbing hysterically. Slowly, weeping and violently shaking, she stretched out her arms and held the squirming child over the brink.

Doug had no gun. But he couldn't just watch. The energy to act came from deep within him. He damned the heat, damned the wind, damned his own soft and overweight body, and damned the man with the knife—and charged.

He reached the baby boy just as the woman let go. He pulled the bundle to his chest as he tipped over the edge into space, into the realm of the infernal Santa Ana. Momentum flipped him over, so that he was between the ground and the kid. That was good.

When he hit, he had the strangest sensation. It stung everywhere, he'd never felt such pain, but at the same time, a soothing coolness enveloped him.

He had landed in the pool. He was somehow alive. But he couldn't move.

He was dimly aware of other officers jumping in the water to be with him.

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He looked up. Another man was falling, windmilling his arms, one hand gripping a long silver knife in the air like a propeller blade.

This one did not land in the pool. This one struck the concrete.

From where the killer had fallen, Doug saw the distant, vengeful face of Laura Ortega staring back down at him, just before he passed out.

Laura came to see him in his room at Memorial Hospital.

"Captain Craig said you thought it was me." There was no accusation in her voice, but he could see her disappointment.

"I'm sorry, Laura. You should have told me about the birthdays," he said. "You should have told me about your husband, and about Rosa."

"That's not something . . . I can talk about. Not yet," she replied, looking away from him. She regained her composure and met his eyes with her own. "Anyhow, I didn't know about the birthdays. I'm not a detective."

"Then why did you call me and ask if I'd found anything connecting the Samms and Loeb cases?"

"It wasn't the birthdays. It was the names. I thought I'd heard the names of the babies before. You know, Jazelle and Sebastian. They're not regular names. It made me wonder where I'd heard them. So I thought I'd ask you, and when you said there was no connection, I thought, well, I'm just being stupid."

"And then you remembered."

"That's right. When Rosa was born, we were all in the same ward at Memorial. Carol was in the same room, even. The two of us got to be friends, we *were* friends, until . . . until Rosa got so sick, she . . ."

Laura's face tightened in anguish. "Anyway, I had just started out on patrol when it hit me. I knew that the other two babies had died when the wind got started, just like it did on that day, and suddenly I was afraid for Carol and her baby."

"So you refused Captain Craig's summons."

"I had to check on Carol. It was nothing but a gut feeling, you know? Not something I could explain. But it was something I had to do."

"You saved her, Laura."

Laura shook her head. "No, you did that. Leo clocked me but good. And you saved Austin too."

"Why—why do you think he did it?"

She shivered. "I don't know."

Her lips trembled and suddenly the words tumbled out. "After

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Rosa died, he blamed me. He beat me up pretty bad. He said I wasn't fit to have his baby.

"You know, I thought he loved me. I remember in the hospital, he told me and Carol how beautiful we were—I bet he said the same thing to Mrs. Loeb and the Samms girl. He told us he could see the pride in our eyes. I thought he was just talking about being proud to have a baby. But I didn't know it was him, not until I found him with Carol. There's no way *you* could have known about it."

Doug's face got hot. He knew if he'd looked hard enough, Leo would have been there.

"He sure was one screwed-up crazy dude," she said flatly.

"Yes, he was," Doug replied slowly. "I don't suppose we'll ever know entirely how crazy he was."

His brow furrowed. He had to ask. He had to know.

"Do you remember at all—I mean, how—how exactly, did Leo fall off the roof?"

Laura didn't answer right away. When she did, she was looking down at her hands, as if wondering whether she could use a manicure.

In a small voice, just above a whisper, she said, "I guess he just slipped."

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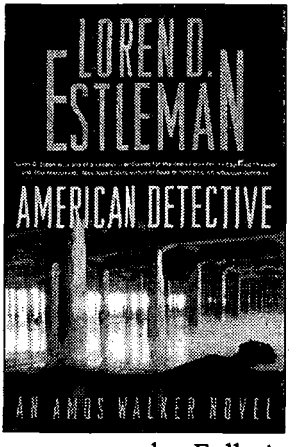
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Booked & Printed

Robert C. Hahn

Private investigators occupy a special place in mystery fiction. They neither have the rights and privileges of members of the law enforcement community, nor all the restrictions. They certainly don't have the same access to resources available to officialdom—but they often have unique resources of their own. This month we look at two authors whose detectives have proven their mettle for decades and continue to perform at a high level, and at a third whose first three books should make readers hope he has similar staying power.

Hardboiled private eyes originated in the great metropolises and clustered around the coastal cities of San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York, and Boston. But Midwestern P.I.'s have had plenty of success as well, from Rob Kantner's Detroit-based Ben Perkins to Jon Valin's Harry Stoner in Cincinnati and Les Roberts's Cleveland P.I., Milan Jacovich. Perhaps the most successful Midwestern run belongs to Loren D. Estleman's Amos Walker, who has been prowling the streets of Detroit since 1980's *Motor City Blue* and continues to do so in his nineteenth appearance in the aptly titled AMERICAN DETECTIVE (Forge, $24.95). Walker has aged but not changed a whole lot in the intervening years. He still smokes, drinks, and swaggers, though perhaps not as much as before—and he still has a smart mouth, and that hasn't changed or abated at all.



In *American Detective* Walker is hired by former Detroit Tiger ballplayer Darius Fuller to buy off a sleazy creep named Hilary Bairn, who is his daughter's fiancé. She's due to come into a sizeable trust fund in just a few months, and Fuller, despite being virtually bankrupt, is willing to offer Bairn fifty thousand to break off the engagement and disappear. Walker agrees to be Fuller's "bag man."

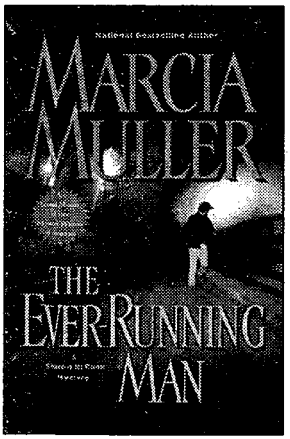
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Sometimes the simplest cases are the most convoluted. Before Walker can meet with Bairn, Fuller's daughter is killed and suspicion is thrown onto Bairn, and then Walker himself. Before the case is resolved Walker will find himself dealing with a loan shark, a gambling honcho and his various enforcers, and a powerful Asian American woman with a legal empire built on illegal enterprises. And another murder.

Estleman writes what he knows. The Detroit setting is perfectly captured, from its iconic sports figures to its politics, from its traffic system to its weather extremes. Estleman is also a master of the hardboiled genre, and while his detective may have lost a step or two, it's obvious that his creator has not. And both detective and author are still winners.

Marcia Muller's first Sharon McCone mystery, 1977's *Edwin of the Iron Shoes*, introduced the prototypical female P.I. Then in 1982 both Sue Grafton's Kinsey Millhone and Sara Paretsky's V.I. Warshawski made their debuts. Cumulatively these three authors blazed a trail that has since become a well-traveled highway, inspiring countless followers. Amazingly, all three remain in the vanguard of the movement more than twenty-five years later.

Marcia Muller's THE EVER-RUNNING MAN (Warner, $24.99) is her twenty-fifth Sharon McCone mystery, and things have changed for the San Francisco–based P.I. after thirty years. She is no longer a lone operative but instead has acquired a staff, including a computer forensics department, a financial investigator, and other operatives.



When her husband, Hy Ripinsky, talks her into investigating a series of bombings that has damaged numerous facilities belonging to the maverick corporate security firm he co-owns, McCone takes on a dangerous, life-threatening case that ultimately threatens her marriage as well.

All three co-owners of RKI—Dan Kessell, Gage Renshaw, and Ripinsky—have checkered pasts with common links to Southeast Asia stemming back to the Vietnam War, so McCone starts her investigation by assigning her staff to probe the pasts of the owners—including her own very private husband.

Muller continues to deliver the complete package in new and entertaining ways, crafting an absorbing mystery around a familiar and evolving cast of characters and providing enough grit and sub-

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stance to make readers look forward to the next installment of her series. It is worth mentioning that Muller's recent nonseries mysteries, including *Cape Perdido* (2005), *Cyanide Wells* (2003), and *Point Deception* (2001), are well worth reading also.

The relative youngster Michael Koryta has created a welcome addition to the ranks of Midwestern private eyes in the person of Cleveland-based Lincoln Perry. His first mystery, *Tonight I Said Goodbye*, won the St. Martins/PWA award and earned an Edgar nomination. That was followed by *Sorrow's Anthem*, which also received critical praise.

A WELCOME GRAVE (St. Martin's Minotaur, $23.95) builds on Lincoln Perry's successes in the first two novels and deepens the reader's understanding of Perry's background, revealing more of how the ex-policeman came to be a private eye and exploring his relationship with ex-fiancée, Karen Jefferson.

Perry is a natural suspect when Alex Jefferson is brutally tortured and murdered—when Jefferson "stole" Karen from him, Perry gave him a public beating, and that incident precipitated his move from policeman to private eye. A suspect, sure, but Perry figures he'll be cleared easily and the cops will move on to try to find the real killer.

Then Karen calls and begs him to come see her. All she wants Perry to do is find Jefferson's estranged son, whose whereabouts are unknown and who doesn't know he stands to inherit millions. Against his better judgment, Perry is persuaded to take the case.

Every door Perry opens, every path he treads leads him deeper and deeper into a morass where he becomes a suspect not only in Jefferson's murder but also in another. Every move he makes is anticipated and countered and serves to entrap him more fully. In order to extricate himself Perry must first convince his old partner Joe Pritchard to help him, and then he must make an ally of one of the most dangerous killers in Cleveland.

Koryta's ingenious plotting is absolutely first-rate, and it isn't often that the author's hero is as thoroughly outmaneuvered and outplayed without ever seeming a fool. Lincoln Perry proves he can hold his own with the best private eyes of the past or the present.

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A SIGN OF PEACE

JAMES T. SHANNON

"I need some help, Gilbert," my cousin Flora said.

"Sure, Flo, what's up?"

I thought it was a coincidence that my cell beeped just as I'd turned onto Route 24 on my way down to Fall River, since that's where Flo lived, as did my parents and most of my aunts, uncles, and other cousins.

"I just called your mom," she said, bursting the coincidence bubble. "She said you were coming to see them and gave me your cell phone number."

"You didn't call my home?"

I live in Putnam, a Boston suburb, where I'm a detective on the police force, and all of my relatives have that number.

"No, uh, I didn't want to disturb Sandra."

"You wouldn't have," I said. "She'd have liked to hear from you."

Most of my relatives have accepted the fact that I didn't exactly wed out of the species when I married a woman who was not Portuguese. But after twelve years some are still a little cautious around my wife. And her name is Sondra, not Sandra. Flo, however, always gets the name wrong because she's Flora, not because she's mean.

"What I wanted to talk to you about is kind of private anyway, Gilbert. And I'd rather speak to you in person, if that's okay."

"Somebody in trouble?" I said, wishing again that the family had a couple of lawyers instead of Gilbert Souza, one lone policeman, who lived sixty miles away and was expected to drive down every time somebody's kid broke a window.

"No, uh, not that kind of trouble, but I do need your help. It'll only take a couple of minutes."

"Sure. I'll be there in less than an hour."

"No, not my house," she said. "I'll meet you at . . . how about at the church? I was going to go there this afternoon anyway."

Though Fall River's got plenty of them, she didn't have to tell me which church. Like most of my family, Flo and her husband and kids still live in Our Lady of Fatima parish.

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"Sure, I'll see you there, then," I said, and disconnected.

Let's see, Saturday afternoon. Flo had to be going to confession so she could be ready with a clean slate for Sunday Mass. And she's the kind of woman whose slate wouldn't be more than a little smudged if she put off confession for months. Me? Well, for years now, the only times I've been in the church have been for baptisms, weddings, and a couple of funerals.

Forty minutes later, I was parking in front of the squat brick structure that had been the heart of the city's first Portuguese parish. But I didn't even get the ignition turned off before Flora was at the passenger door.

Small, dark haired, and trim for a woman who's had six children in the ten years she's been married, she was in the car and whisking her hand at me to get driving.

"Remember, girl, you just went to confession," I said. "And we *are* first cousins."

She shook her head and spritzed out something that sounded like a very old-fashioned "Pshaw."

"I just didn't want anybody to see us together because then they might mention it to Henry," she said. "Then he might ask me why you were down here. And I just couldn't lie to my husband."

Yep, pure Flora. She meant it too. The *pshaw*, the confession, the six kids, the reluctance to lie to anyone, never mind her jerk of a husband, Henry. Even as kids, I never told Flo anything that might require her to lie to cover for me.

"Okay," I said, after we'd cleared the neighborhood and I had stopped in a small park. "What's the problem?"

She took a deep breath, let it out slowly, whispered, "It's Phillip Furtado."

Flo could still surprise me. Not that I thought Phil Furtado couldn't be a problem. But for Flora?

"What about Phil?" I said.

"He's been . . . I don't know how to say this, Gilbert. He's been *bothering* me."

"Bothering how?"

"During Mass. That's the worst thing about it. It's during Mass."

Okay, I was a little relieved to hear that. There wasn't too much bothering even Phil could do during the crowded Sunday Masses at Our Lady of Fatima.

"What's he doing?"

"Well, it's really only during the sign of peace," she said.

She meant the handshake exchanged by congregation members. I imagined Phil as a kid with a joy buzzer hidden in his palm.

"What's he doing during the handshake?"

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"It's the sign of peace, Gilbert," she said, frowning at my flippancy, "and what he's doing is he's always *there*. No matter where I'm sitting, Phillip's always positioned so I sort of have to shake hands with him. In front of me, in back. He doesn't have the nerve to try to sit next to me, but he's always there. And it's driving me crazy, Gilbert."

"How about Henry? Hasn't he noticed it?"

Henry's got about five inches and fifty pounds, most of it muscle, on Phil. And he'd never been too timid about using that muscle, including a few times, I've suspected, on his wife.

"Henry doesn't, you know, come to church with me. He tells me he goes to the Saturday Mass so he can stay with the kids while I go on Sunday. But he comes back from his Mass smelling of beer and peppermint breath mints, so I'm pretty sure he's attending services at the Ace.

The Ace is a bar two blocks and about five Commandments away from Our Lady of Fatima.

"So you think, what," I asked, "that Phil's trying to make a move on you?"

She nodded, her eyes watering.

"It's been every Sunday for about two months now, Gilbert. The first week, I didn't think anything about it. I was just surprised to see Phillip at Mass. The second time I figured for a coincidence. The third week I began to get nervous. After that, I knew."

"Does he do anything besides shake your hand? Does he say anything?"

"No, he only takes my hand. And he says 'Peace be with you,' you know, the way you're supposed to. But he looks at me with those big puppy eyes, and a couple of times he's been so nervous that he reaches out with his left hand. It's really driving me crazy, Gilbert. I need your help. If Henry ever finds out, something terrible will happen to Phillip."

I got the sense that maybe Flora was enjoying this more than she let on and probably feeling guilty about even that. The nuns at Our Lady of Fatima grammar school always taught us that a sin was a sin in thought, word, and deed. If you enjoyed thinking about something, you had done the same as if you'd committed the action. So Flora had called on her older cousin to step in and take away whatever temptation Phil was offering her.

"I'll speak to him," I said. "You know where he's living?"

"I think in those new Evergreen condos down north," she said.

Fall River's built on hills, and since most of the north end is downhill, it's always *down* north. But the condos she mentioned

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were far away from Our Lady of Fatima, and I had to wonder how she knew where he was living.

"I saw his address in the phone book," she said, as if reading my mind. She was frowning, too, so I guess she knew my mind had been suspicious as she added, "I was looking up his phone number to call him, to ask him to stop bothering me. But I couldn't get up the nerve to do it."

"You still know his number?" I said, taking out my cell phone.

She rattled it off, and I punched it in without comment on her memory.

Phil answered cheerfully but lost the gloss when I gave him my name.

"Hey, Gilbert," he said. "How you been?"

Since we'd never been close friends, and he knew I was a police detective, his fake enthusiasm struck a wrong note. I suppose I'd been hoping Flora had just been confused, not an unusual state of mind for her.

"I want to know if it's okay if I come by to talk to you," I said.

"Sure, 'course it's okay, Gilbert. Anytime. Is this a . . . what . . . some official kind of visit?"

"No, nothing like that. It'll only take a couple of minutes."

"Sure, sure. You coming down to the city today?"

"I'm in the city now. Visiting my folks."

"Well, you want to come on over now, that's fine with me," he said, though I doubt very much that he meant it.

He gave me his address at Evergreen, and I told him I'd be there in a few minutes and disconnected.

"Thank you," Flora said, letting out a deep breath she'd apparently been holding in.

"No problem, Flo. I'm not sure what I can do legally, but I'll give it a try anyway. Uh, you know what Phil's been up to?"

"You mean when he's not trying to seduce married women during one of the church's most blessed sacraments?"

"Yeah, that."

Phil was Flora's age and had always been a fringe kind of guy. Not bad himself, though he had liked to give that impression even as a kid. And later he always seemed to hang around people with bad reputations.

"I don't know, " Flora said. "I think he's some kind of salesman."

"Okay. I'll drop you off at home . . . near home," I added, when I saw the alarmed look in her eyes. "And I'll call you after I talk to Phil."

"Henry's gone on Saturdays at his Ace Mass from four thirty till about six."

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"I'll call you then," I said, heading back toward her neighborhood and feeling as if I'd somehow become part of an intrigue.

The Evergreen condos were back out toward Route 24, handy for people who commuted to Boston. Also handy for single people who were living in a city of triple-deckers originally built for big, mill-working families.

Phil was in Building D, redbrick and white trimmed like the rest. If there had ever been evergreens in the area of Evergreen, they must have been cut down during construction. A red Mercedes convertible was parked in the space reserved for Phil's apartment. I spoiled the overall impression by parking next to it.

Phil's unit was 2-C, and he was opening the door as I reached the top of the carpeted stairs.

"Gilbert!" he said, as if surprised to see me. Big smile, hand out for mine.

I took it, tempted to say, "Peace be with you" to confirm why I was here, but I didn't remember him as having much of a sense of humor, though I do remember he seemed to laugh a lot.

He was of average height and weight, and his hair, professionally styled, was still dark and curly. His clothes looked flashy but, like his haircut and his car, expensive.

"C'mon in, c'mon in, buddy," he said, waving me into a spacious and somewhat overdecorated apartment.

"Can I get you something? Scotch, beer? Or coffee, if you're on the job."

"No thanks, Phil, nothing really. I can't stay and my folks are expecting me."

I sat on his plush tan couch, my feet sinking into his plush cream-colored carpeting.

He asked about my parents, my wife and kids, his eyes bobbing, not at all puppy looking. And he kept moving around as if he couldn't decide whether to sit or run.

"I'm really here to talk to you about my cousin Flora," I said.

That stopped him in mid sentence. He frowned, said, "Who?"

"Flora. Flo Oliveira. Flo Souza when she went to school with you."

"Yeah, right, I knew who you meant. I mean, I've always known Flo. But what's the problem?"

He was good, I'll give him that, going in a millisecond from looking like he was trying to hide a cocaine habit to looking, I don't know, stunned.

"She told me about you at the Masses at Our Lady of Fatima," I said. "Sitting near her and taking her hand during the handshake thing. She thinks you're . . . insinuating yourself on her too much."

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"Me? On your cousin? Gilbert, I wouldn't . . ."

He stopped whatever he was going to say, took a deep breath, dropped himself into one of the other tan couches, and said, "I'm sorry, Gilbert. And please tell Flo I'm sorry. I didn't want to give her a wrong impression. I swear I didn't, and I promise I'll leave her alone."

"You're sure?" I said. "I didn't want to have to tell her about how to get a restraining order."

It would have been a lot safer than telling Henry about what was going on.

"No, no, Gilbert. I swear, I won't go near her again. Swear to God. I didn't know it was bothering her."

People lie to me every day on the job, but he seemed to be telling the truth.

"Well, I'm sorry to have bothered you about a misunderstanding," I said, rising. "It was just, y'know, Flora was afraid to say anything to her husband, Henry. So she asked me to talk to you."

"No problem, no problem, buddy. I'm glad it was something so easy to clear up."

He followed me to the door, made some halfhearted attempt to ask me if I really wanted anything to drink, and I made a halfhearted assurance that my parents were waiting for me.

"Give 'em my best, then," he said. "And, again, tell Flo how sorry I am about the misunderstanding."

I drove away from Evergreen feeling that this had been too easy and that somehow Phil and I hadn't been talking about the same thing. But as I thought back over what we'd said, I couldn't see any room for confusion. So since it was past time for Henry to be off to the Ace, I called Flora and gave her the good news.

"Thank you, Gilbert," she said. "Thank you so much."

I could hear what sounded like all six of her children, ages nine to one, arguing about something in the background, so we didn't talk long, though I did manage to tell her to let me know if Phil didn't keep his promise. I also asked her, as I always do, how Henry was. She told me he was fine, pretending again that she didn't know what I meant.

Then I drove to my parents' home to be grilled by two expert interrogators on the status of my own marriage.

I didn't give a single thought to Flo and Phil over the next couple of weeks, so when my cell phone rang and the caller ID showed Henry Oliveira's name, a sudden "uh-oh" bounced through my brain. I wondered if he was calling from a jail on a

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manslaughter rap as I answered.

"Gilbert, I gotta talk to you," Flora said.

"Yeah, Flo, what's up?" I said, tentatively relieved.

"It's Phillip Furtado again."

"What? He didn't keep his promise?"

"No, no, Gilbert. It's not that. Well, he did show up for the eleven o'clock Mass at Our Lady's again the day after you talked to him, but he didn't sit near me. Though he was a little close behind as we were leaving."

"We? You were with Henry?"

"No, no. My friend Doris. I almost always go to Mass with her. But he didn't bother me. No, the problem is Phillip's gone."

"Gone? But isn't that what you wanted?"

"No, I mean, gone from the city. Disappeared. Gone that way."

"Flo, he's a single guy. He can go anywhere he wants to, any time he wants to."

"Without his car? I don't think so, Gilbert. He's got a little red convertible, and it's still parked outside his apartment. It's been there for two weeks now."

My first unasked question was, of course, how the hell did she know his car had been in front of his apartment for two weeks? But that was one minefield I didn't want to wander into.

"If he took a plane somewhere, he could have gotten a ride to the airport. Maybe he didn't want to leave his convertible parked at the airport."

"But nobody at the condos where he lives knows what happened to him either. They think maybe something bad happened."

Okay, the minefield seemed determined to come to me.

"What were you doing at his condo, Flo?"

"Me? For God's sake, I'm a married woman, Gilbert. With six kids. I haven't been anywhere near his stupid condo."

"Then how do you know all this about him?"

"My friend told me. We talked about it, and I told her she should look into it. Her being single and all."

"Your friend?"

"Right, Doris. I told you about her. She's my best friend. We go to Mass together, and I told her I'd spoken to you about Phillip and all."

"Doris who?"

"Doris Nobrega, of course. You remember her, don't you? She was a couple of years behind me at Our Lady's, but she's always lived in the neighborhood."

Doris Nobrega. Yep, I remembered her all right. I remembered her father, too, Frank Nobrega. He had disappeared almost two

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years ago, one step ahead of a federal investigation into racketeering in southeastern New England.

"Doris goes to Mass with you every Sunday?" I said.

"Of course."

"And she went to the Evergreen condos to look for Phil?"

"Yes. Why? Oh no, Gilbert. It wasn't nothing like that. Doris never even looked at him. And she's as single as single could be. If Phillip wanted to see her, he wouldn't have to go to Mass. He could call her, see her anywhere he wanted to."

Sure he could. Anywhere at all.

It was Friday afternoon. My mom, knowing she could always bribe Sondra and my kids with the promise, had called earlier in the week saying she'd made some kale soup and would buy some *massa*, Portuguese sweet bread, if we could come down for lunch on Sunday.

"Tell you what, Flora, how 'bout I stop by the church and we can talk after the Mass?"

"Okay, Gilbert. I just . . . I just hope me getting you involved in this didn't lead Phillip to do something drastic."

"I'm sure it didn't. I'll see you Sunday, okay?"

"Okay," she said, but she didn't sound too okay as she disconnected.

We got to my parents' house after eleven. I told them I had to leave for a few minutes, but I'd be back a little after noon. I'd already told Sondra my plans, and my mom and dad couldn't have cared less so long as they had my wife, son, and daughter to entertain.

I had some trouble finding a parking spot, but the priest was just finishing his sermon by the time I slipped into the back of the church. I stood there for a while, looking around as if I were searching for a seat. But I was really looking for a person, uncertain whether it would be a male or female.

It was a male. Couldn't miss him, really. He was alone in a pew at the back. He was tall and pale in a church full of people who mostly were not. He had a close haircut and a bland suit and tie. And he was looking toward the left side aisle, up front, where my cousin was standing next to her best friend, Doris Nobrega.

I slipped into the pew and sidestepped over to be next to him. He hadn't looked, but I sensed that he knew where I was from the time I'd entered the church. He didn't even tense as I reached into my pocket. He nodded as he looked down to the shield I was showing him.

He waited until it was time for the congregation to respond to

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the priest, a response I doubt he knew anyway, before he hissed out of the side of his mouth, "What do you want, Mr. Souza?"

"Where's Phillip Furtado?"

"You guys want him for something?"

"Nope. I just want to know where he is."

"We haven't got him."

"You sure? You been watching him right here for a couple of months, passing notes to Nobrega's daughter."

"How the hell did you know . . . ?"

But there was a break in the prayers and he had to shut up. He'd given me what I needed anyway. My cousin had helped explain it, though she hadn't realized that was what she was doing, especially her mention of Phil sometimes offering her his left hand. I later figured out what it could be because he had something he wanted to give Doris in his right hand and Flora had greeted him first. I mean, when you know the Feds are watching your family, probably tapping your phones and keeping video cameras on their every move, where else could you regularly communicate with them but at Mass? While the Feds were watching you do it, no less. Frank Nobrega would like that, I think.

"You don't have Phil?" I asked, as the prayers began again.

He shook his head briefly, said, "Someone must have scared him off. We had a wire in his place. About a week before he left, we taped some moron telling him to stay away from the other woman, the one up there with Nobrega's daughter. We ran the moron's plate, found out he was a cop too. But he never really knew what the hell Furtado was up to. Neither did Nobrega's daughter's friend. That visit probably scared Furtado into running."

Hmm. Right. It might have. That was probably why Phil had come to the church the last time and was behind my cousin and her best friend Doris as they left. One final note. Kind of a romantic gesture, if you think about it in a slightly off-center way.

Speaking of off-center, since this guy obviously knew who I was even before seeing my shield, I wondered why no one with a neat haircut wearing a bland suit had come to see me in the weeks following my visit to Phil.

"She's my cousin," I said quietly. "And I didn't know about your operation."

He let out a small snort, nodded, said, "We know who she is, and we figured you had no clue. We checked with your chief anyway."

Damn! I would have preferred they'd just shown up at my house in one of their inconspicuous sedans.

"I want to talk to her after Mass."

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"Not about us. Not that it matters, though. This whole phase of the operation's been a dead end from the beginning."

"No, I just want to tell my cousin that Phil's okay. She's worried about him. She thinks he took off because of her."

He snorted again, shrugged his okay just as the priest was announcing the sign of peace and people began turning to shake hands with those around them. There was no one within reach of either of us.

"Don't even think about it," he hissed out of the side of his mouth.

I waited outside for Flora. When she came out, she was, of course, with Doris, so I asked if we could speak alone. I was sure there was some directional mic in a nearby van pointed at us, picking up whatever we said.

Doris stepped back but, knowing what we were talking about, eyed me narrowly.

"Look, Flo," I said, "I can't tell you why I know this, but Phil's okay. And he didn't leave because of anything you did. You know I wouldn't lie to you about something like this, so you'll just have to believe me."

"Then he wasn't . . . wasn't . . . trying to, you know, get close to me?" she said, looking a little more disappointed than relieved.

"I never said that," I said.

It was true, I hadn't said that.

"Then he was?" she said.

Married ten years, mother to six, wife to hot-tempered Henry, she'd never asked for much. And had never gotten much.

I took her hand and smiled, and her eyes lit briefly, brilliantly, and she nodded and smiled back.

"Gotta go," I said, kissing her on the cheek and looking past her, past Doris, to the church door, now almost empty except for the tall, pale man in the nondescript suit who seemed to be listening to something no one else could hear. He shrugged his shoulders, briefly smiled toward me, and lifted the first two fingers of his right hand by his side in a V. It was a gesture that I realized, with an appreciation for his sense of irony, was also a sign of peace.

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THE SURVIVOR OF THE STORMS

DICK STODGHILL

After Roman Stankowski had hobbled off to the restroom, I turned to the little man seated beside me and said, "What do you make of it, Ernie? Do you believe his story?"

"I can't make up my mind. It's a wild one, that's for sure, but I can't see why he would be telling it if it isn't true."

"Unless he's a nut case. Say it is true, then he doesn't need a newspaper reporter, he needs a detective. I know the best in the business if he wants to talk to him."

"Ask him when he comes back."

So I did, and he did. I went to a phone booth and called home, the boardinghouse on Dudley Street. Mrs. Bauer grumbled when I asked her to get Jack Eddy, but she climbed the stairs to his room and a couple of minutes later he was on the line. Twenty minutes after that, he came striding into the restaurant at the Mayflower, Akron's finest hotel, gave the glad hand to a couple of people he recognized, then sat down at our table in that cocky way of his that made it seem that the chairman of the board had arrived and now we could get down to business.

After being introduced, Jack shook Roman Stankowski's hand but gave me a raised-eyebrow look that clearly asked if I had summoned him to meet some bum off the street. His manner was more cordial when he turned to the fourth man at the table and said, "So you're Ernie Pyle, the guy with that cream-puff job. I read your stuff sometimes. Not bad."

It had begun nine hours earlier when I walked into the *Times-Press* newsroom after completing my morning rounds on the police beat. I pulled up short because every desk was deserted. Instead of banging out copy with deadline approaching, everyone was gathered in a tight little circle near the managing editor's office. I walked over to see what was going on, then stopped halfway and went back to my desk. Ernie Pyle, the star of the

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Linda Weatherly

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Scripps-Howard syndicate, was to be in Akron for a couple of days, and it was obvious that he had arrived. He was the envy of nearly every reporter in the land because of his assignment: driving around the country, stopping for a day or week or month wherever he pleased, and then writing a daily column on anything of interest to him. Even the best of us had to admit one thing, though: He had the plush assignment because he could write the socks off every other Scripps-Howard employee.

Pyle had a way of putting words together that painted a picture, brought his columns to life in your mind so you could see the scenes he described and, when he wrote about people, you could feel their pain or share their joy. Any reporter worth his salt could do it on occasion; Ernie Pyle did it five days a week. People loved his stuff. Woe to the copy editor who trimmed his column to fit a space if readers were able to tell something was missing.

I would have preferred to rush down there after the shooting ended and get the story that way.

With someone like that you expect a bigger-than-life character, so I was stunned when the crowd parted and there he was, Ernie Pyle in the flesh. He was a shrimp, a skinny little guy with a nearly bald head, a tortured expression on his face, and the biggest Borsalino hat I had ever seen in his hands. It was brand new, fresh from the carton, but wouldn't be that way for long if he continued to twist the brim as he was doing. It took about five seconds to realize that this was not someone who basked in the glory of his notoriety but instead was a mild-mannered little guy who hated being the center of attention. But then he smiled at something someone said, and it lit up the room.

The brass hats were taking him to lunch. Even city editor Ben Goldsmith was going along, so his assistant had taken over his desk. A couple of hours later Goldsmith laughed as he told a few of us what had happened during their stay at Puffy and Louie's, one of those restaurants that were popular in the 1930s, the kind where the waiters made a game of insulting the customers and people couldn't get enough of it. Certain people, that is, and I knew Ernie Pyle was not one of them. Pyle had been set up in advance. When asked what he wanted, he hesitated a second or two, so the waiter yelled, "Hey, this rube won't order!" Other waiters came running, picked up the chair with Pyle on it, carried it outside, and set it down on the sidewalk, then went back to their duties. They polished his bald spot, and when the group was ready to leave and Pyle had retrieved his decrepit old raincoat from a hook, the waiters came running again and started pulling silver-

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ware and salt and pepper shakers from the pockets, making quite a spectacle of it. The big shots from the paper thought it was hilarious. Poor Ernie . . . Well, I guess he managed a weak grin.

In late afternoon I was dawdling around the office, thinking it was too early to go home, too late to do anything else, when Ernie Pyle came in, saw I was the only one there, said, "Hi," and turned to leave again. He was almost to the door when he stopped, took a few steps back toward me, and said, "Is there a quiet place close by where a man can get a drink?"

"Stone's Grille at this time of day. It's a few blocks north on Main Street."

"Care to join me?"

Do zebras have stripes? I was on my feet before he had time to change his mind. When he asked my name and what I did at the paper I said, "Bram Geary. I cover the police beat."

"A lot of the best men in the business started that way."

As we walked up High Street he said he wasn't drinking at the time, but I knew his reputation for hitting the bottle and decided that to him a couple of drinks didn't constitute drinking. He also told me his wife, Jerry, was going to join him in Akron late that evening. Pyle didn't say so, but I had heard via the grapevine that she had been drying out in a sanitarium somewhere. Word had it that the pair of them kept a distillery or two in business.

An hour later and Stone's would be busy with men lined up at the bar and early diners on the other side of the barrier, but at four o'clock there were only a couple of others in the place. When we were seated on barstools, Pyle repeated the strange story told to him the previous evening by a man he had met at the Mayflower. After winding it up he said, "It's interesting, but it's not something I can use. If you think you might, I'll be talking to him again about seven thirty at the hotel."

After a grand dinner of Mrs. Bauer's meat loaf and mashed potatoes with apple pie for dessert, I drove back downtown, was introduced to Roman Stankowski, heard his story firsthand, then phoned Jack Eddy. An assistant manager at the Akron office of Wellington's National Detective Agency, Jack had the room across from mine at the boardinghouse.

Stankowski was a husky man of about forty with a round Slavic face tanned and creased by hard years spent in the sun and wind. He walked with a pronounced limp and a tic kept his right eyelid in motion. He wore a cheap brown suit and a red-and-blue-striped necktie decorated with a few stains from meals long eaten. As he repeated his story a third time, skepticism was written all over Jack Eddy's face.

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In as few words as possible it went like this: Stankowski was a sailor on a Great Lakes ore boat, the kind longer than a football field, or even two. It was one of many plying the waters between the west end of Lake Superior and the ports on Lake Erie. From Duluth it carried iron ore from the Misabi Range to Cleveland, Ashtabula, Conneaut, and Erie, then made the return trip loaded with coal from the bituminous fields in Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and southeast Ohio. The season began with the Blessing of the Fleet in April, ended in late November or early December when the lake waters began to freeze over. The Great Lakes are plagued by deadly and, in some years, frequent storms that in an hour's time can turn placid blue water into towering waves twenty feet high. On Erie, the shallowest of the lakes, the storm-driven waves hit in rapid succession, so there is no time to recover from one before the next hits. They say that six thousand ore boats and other craft have gone to the bottom on the Great Lakes, taking thirty thousand people with them. It's a dangerous way to earn a living.

I recalled an early December day when I had stood in a light rain on an embankment overlooking the harbor at Conneaut. An ore boat, probably the last of the season, was trying to fight its way past the breakwater into the open sea beyond but was making only slight progress. I watched, cold and wet but too fascinated by the battle between man and nature to leave. At last it made it through the breakwater, so after a few more minutes I turned and headed for my car, thankful that I was on shore and not on that long, wave-battered ore boat.

Roman Stankowski was born in 1900 and had grown up near the lake in Lorain. He married an Akron girl named Marie Strabic the day after Christmas in 1922. She was pregnant when he returned to his boat, the *John W. Morgan*, in early April 1923. On the first trip of the season, Stankowski had a run-in with the captain of the *Morgan* and left the ship at Duluth. Another, the *Carty-Jamison No. 2*, was ready to head out and was short a man, so Stankowski signed on at the last minute. While heading east on Lake Erie the boat was caught in a vicious storm a dozen miles east of Cedar Point. Stankowski had just gone off duty and was ready to climb onto his bunk when there was a terrific crash. He made his way on deck and found the boat had broken in two. The last thing he recalled was being hurled across the deck, then inky blackness.

That was in April 1923. He awoke in a hospital bed, his head swathed in bandages. Semiconscious, he was aware of people coming into his room every now and then, looking at him and shaking

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their heads, then leaving. He was lucid the following day and was told he had been picked up by a small lumber-hauling boat out of Saginaw. That didn't make sense to him because his ore boat had been on Lake Erie, not Huron. Late in the day he was given a newspaper by an orderly. Some of the stories on the front page also didn't make sense, so he looked at the date. He let the paper fall and for a few minutes sat there stunned, thinking his head was hurt more than he realized and his mind was playing weird tricks on him. He managed to get out of bed, stumble unsteadily to the bathroom, and look in a mirror. Instead of seeing the reflection of a twenty-three-year old, he saw the grizzled face of a middle-aged man.

The date on the Saginaw paper was correct, it was May 27, 1938, not an April day in 1923. He was totally bewildered. According to the story, the ore boat he had been on when it went under was the *Lewis J. Russell*, not the *Carty-Jamison No. 2*, and he had never heard of the *Lewis J. Russell*. Nor had he heard the name the nurses were calling him, Mr. Cermak—Joseph Cermak. Doctors examined him, one after another, and he gradually came to accept the fact that he was the victim of some form of amnesia that had blotted out fifteen years of his life.

At a library after being released from the hospital he read the story of the earlier sinking of the *Carty-Jamison No. 2* on a day when several boats were lost. Two men from his boat had been rescued by the Coast Guard. One was hospitalized, the other disappeared before anyone had an opportunity to talk to him. That, he decided, could have been him.

As Joseph Cermak he had received a check for a goodly sum from the owners of the *Lewis J. Russell*. He knew that wasn't his real name and so wondered if there really was a Joseph Cermak who had gone down with the ore boat. Or, difficult as it was to believe, had he been Joseph Cermak for fifteen years?

He traveled to Akron by train, wondering what he would find when he arrived. It turned out some things were just as he remembered, others far different. There was no trace of Marie Stankowski after all those years, and he was bewildered as to what to do next. He had been hanging around for weeks doing odd jobs to augment the check he had received.

Jack Eddy wasn't buying it. "So you want to find your wife," he said, "and you want to know what this Joseph Cermak was doing during the missing fifteen years, right?"

"That's it. Can you help me?"

"I'll think about it." Jack handed Stankowski a Wellington's National Detective Agency business card and said, "If you're still

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interested in the morning, come to the office and we'll talk some more about it."

We left then and Ernie Pyle headed to the depot to meet his wife. When we were back at the boardinghouse I followed Jack Eddy to his room. "You don't believe him, do you?" I said.

"I don't know, buddy. I don't place much stock in this amnesia business. Hell, even the medics don't know much about it."

"If he's not on the level, why come up with the story?"

"How do I know? Look, friend, maybe he's off his rocker, or maybe he's concocted some sort of alibi for a crime he committed during those years he claims are a blank. I don't have much truck with this kind of stuff, but if he shows in the morning I'll give it some thought. Provided he's got a fistful of cash for a retainer. I'm not tying the agency up on a thing like this without it."

After finishing my afternoon rounds the next day, I decided to stop by City Hospital to see my sister Catharine. We were young kids when our parents died in a car crash, so we had grown up at the Children's Home. Catharine had recently graduated from nurses' training and now worked in the emergency room. I didn't see her as often as a big brother should. This was made clear when she saw me after I had been standing around for a few minutes and said, "What are you doing here, Bram?"

"Just wanted to say hello, see how you're doing."

"I'm doing fine. So what do you really want?"

"Well, I did want to ask what you know about amnesia. Is there really such a thing?"

"Of course."

"Could a man have it for fifteen years and not remember anything about those years?"

"Of course."

"Can it be faked?"

"Of course."

"Will you quit saying that? Tell me what you know about it."

"Not much, really. There are differing opinions about what is genuine and what isn't. In some cases there's no doubt, in others the doctors don't always agree. There's a lot about amnesia that is still unknown."

"For Pete's sake, Catharine, this is 1938, not the Civil War era. I thought you people knew all about such things."

"You're wrong. Now I have to get back to work."

I turned to leave, then said, "That poor guy they helped in here while I was parking the car, the one that could hardly breathe with asthma or something. How is he?"

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"Dead," she replied, then walked away.

I left shaking my head. She could stand a little work on her bedside manner.

Jack Eddy pulled his 1932 Auburn sedan up in front of the boardinghouse shortly before supper time. I stepped out on the porch to meet him. "Did you take Stankowski's case?"

"Yeah. After he gave me a thousand dollar retainer."

"A thousand bucks? Wow! That's a lot of money."

"We'll earn it, buddy, and probably more than that."

"I've been thinking, Jack. Would Stankowski be better off forgetting the whole thing?"

"Not if he's on the level, friend. What's worse, finding out the truth, good or bad, or spending the rest of his days moping around barrooms with those questions in his head? That could drive a man haywire. Or make a souse of him."

"So now what?"

"Our Detroit office is checking out his story in Saginaw. I've got Cliff Austin and a new man, Mac McKelvey, chasing down the long-lost wife, and Cal Andres is up at the lake seeing what he can find out about the sinking of the *Carty-Jamison No. 2* in 1923."

"You still don't believe his story, do you?"

"I don't know, buddy. I'm keeping an open mind."

"Think it's time for me to write a story on it?"

He walked on into the house with a shrug of his shoulders. "That's your department. I don't care one way or the other."

So I went back downtown after supper and wrote up what I knew, although making sense of it wasn't easy. When I walked in the newsroom the next morning Ben Goldsmith was all excited. He loved the story and wanted to know when there would be a follow-up. That made me begin to regret ever hearing of Roman Stankowski.

Sue Baney was full of questions about my story when I picked her up that evening for a ride around town and maybe an ice cream soda someplace. She kept calling Stankowski "that poor lost soul" and nearly bit my head off when I suggested he might be a con man. "Con men don't pay a detective a thousand dollars," she said. I admitted she had a point.

Her reaction was like that of many people, and it puzzled me. Not once had I ever heard her express concern that the world seemed headed for another big war, but mention some down-on-his-luck slob and she got all choked up and teary eyed. I just couldn't understand people. At Sue's insistence we took in a

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movie, Mickey Rooney in *Love Finds Andy Hardy*, but my mind was on things more important than the escapades of a precocious, puffed-up kid.

I hadn't seen Jack Eddy for a few days before he came swaggering into the newsroom, perched himself on a corner of my desk, and, as if he were announcing some world-shaking piece of news, said, "We found Marie Stankowski."

"I assume that was an editorial 'we' and it really was one of your operatives that found her. So where was she?"

"Here in town. And don't get flippant with me if you want to hear about it. Anyway, Cliff Austin found she had Stankowski declared legally dead years ago. After that she remarried and is living up in Cuyahoga Falls with her second husband and Stankowski's fifteen-year-old son. She got hitched to a Myron Bullington up in Ravenna, which is why Cliff didn't track her down the first day. He says Marie is a shriveled-up harpy and the kid is a totally obnoxious pain in the butt. "

"Then she isn't living here in town but up in the Falls."

"So who can tell the difference? You're really in a mood today, aren't you, buddy? Combative, I'd call it."

"Does Stankowski know yet?"

"Two days ago. And an hour ago he gave me another five hundred bucks to check out the new husband. He nosed around a little and thinks there's something fishy about the guy."

"Like what's so fishy?"

"I said it was an hour ago. Sorry I don't have it all wrapped up yet, but do you think you could give me the rest of the day to work on it?" He jumped up off the desk and headed for the door. "You're really something today, pal. Better take an aspirin or a good-humor pill."

Artie Bauer, twelve-year-old son of my landlady, was sitting on the front porch steps when I arrived home in late afternoon. In passing I said, "How's it going, Artie?"

"What's it to yuh?"

I pulled up short. "What's your problem, kid? Forget how to act civil?"

"Aw, hell. Maw wants to know why I ain't goin' to the Boy Scout meetin' tonight."

I sat down beside him. "And why aren't you?"

" 'Cause me'n Hawkeye got throwed out last week."

"For what, not being able to speak a recognizable form of the English language?" I laughed a little. Artie didn't.

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"Nothin' like that. The scoutmaster said some kids just ain't cut out to be Scouts."

"What in the world did you do, Artie? What brought this on?"

"Nothin'. Well, yuh know that Camporee out at Camp Manatoc two weeks ago? Me'n Hawkeye won the fire buildin' contest."

"And for that they threw you out of the Scouts?"

He grinned, then started laughing. "Well, yuh see Hawkeye brung along a little can uh lighter fluid and I had these matches. You shoulda seen it, Bram. Them other kids was rubbin' sticks together and me'n Hawkeye had flames shootin' ten feet in the air. They give us first prize, then took it away again."

I got up and went on inside the house. That scoutmaster was right.

Sue Baney and I had hamburgers at the Spotless Spot drive-in a few evenings later, then went back to her place and danced to some numbers on the radio. Visions that I didn't tell her about flashed through my mind when Larry Clinton's band played the big hit of the day, "I Married an Angel." Before going to bed I tapped lightly on Jack Eddy's door, opened it when he called, "Come in." He was sitting in his easy chair—something I didn't have in my smaller room—wearing just his shorts and undershirt and reading the latest issue of *Liberty Magazine*. He said, "Come to pick another fight, buddy?"

I ignored that. "I've been wondering what it was that Stankowski thinks smells bad about Marie's new husband. Have you found anything out yet?"

"Not much, but we're working on it. This Myron Bullington impressed our man who checked him out as a weakling that has the idea he's a big shot. A phony who doesn't realize he is one. He works at an old two-story building on Orleans Avenue, but nobody seems to know what kind of an operation it is. No sign on the place, the front door is always locked, a dozen or more employees that have to knock to get in every morning. If somebody knocks on the door during the day, no one answers. When they get a delivery at a loading dock at the side, a few employees come out and do the work so the driver never goes inside. Stankowski saw a truck load up with merchandise and drive off a couple of times. No lettering on the truck, no identifying marks."

"How big a truck?"

"Good size. Not a tractor-trailer rig, but big."

"Doesn't sound like much to me."

Jack Eddy laughed. "Why doesn't that surprise me, buddy?"



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A few days went by before I heard anything more. In the meantime I had driven down Orleans Avenue, a dreary street in the shadow of the Goodrich plant at the south end of downtown just a couple of blocks from the *Times-Press.* Calling it an avenue was someone's idea of a joke because it ran for only a single block south off Exchange Street. The buildings that lined both sides were a hodgepodge of dilapidated one- and two-story structures that at some point in the distant past might have been halfway respectable. Now they were a display of failed enterprises that brought to mind the song "Boulevard of Broken Dreams." Except, of course, that boulevard was an even bigger misnomer than avenue.

What Jack Eddy had to tell me after supper at the boardinghouse wasn't exactly earthshaking. "Cal Andres got a job at that dump on Orleans Avenue today, buddy."

"No kidding. What did he find out?"

"Not much so far. They had him unloading and then unpacking crates from a truck all day. From what little he saw, most of the people were just packing up other boxes for shipment. He should know more in a day or two."

"If it's some kind of shady operation couldn't he be in danger?"

Jack gave me a one-knuckle punch on the arm that stung like fire. "That's what our line of work is all about, buddy. Cal can take care of himself. He didn't go in and start asking questions and stand gawking around, you know."

"How did he ever get a job there?"

"Watched the place one afternoon until the employees started leaving, then followed a couple of them to a bar on Main Street. Once there he struck up a conversation and one thing led to another with Cal kind of steering things. Cal was back at the bar the next day, and one of the guys told him to meet him the next morning because the plant manager agreed to talk to him about a job. The manager, by the way, turned out to be Myron Bullington."

I thought about it before turning in that night. It took a real adventurer to have a job like Jack Eddy's or Cal Andres's. I could see where the excitement, the living on the edge of danger, could be appealing to a certain breed of man. I decided I wasn't one of them.

I was sitting alone on the front porch swing listening to Kenny Baker sing "Loved Walked In" on someone's radio across the street when Jack Eddy parked his Auburn sedan in front of the boardinghouse late in the afternoon a couple of days later. Jack came bounding up the steps, excitement written all over his face. Before

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I could open my mouth, he said, "It's a record counterfeiting operation, buddy."

"A what?"

"They're counterfeiting phonograph records down there on Orleans Avenue. A first-class operation with top-grade equipment, a press for printing labels, the whole shebang."

"I don't get it. You mean to sell?"

"What else would you expect?"

"Come on, Jack. A record only costs thirty-five cents."

"*Only* thirty-five cents. To a kid that's big money, but that's not the point. Look, let me explain it to you. They pick up legitimate records the day they're released, or maybe have connections to get them before they hit the market. From that they make their own masters on the best equipment available and run off as many copies as they want. A real expert—a Tommy Dorsey or a Benny Goodman—might tell the difference in quality, but not one person in ten thousand could. A machine applies the labels they printed, then they box them up and they're ready to ship."

"Ship to where? Record stores have their own wholesalers they buy from, don't they?"

"They don't go after the really big stores, but in the territory they cover there are hundreds of mom-and-pop dealers plus other businesses that sell records as a sideline. One day a couple of tough guys with bulges under their suit coats walk in, tell them they represent a new wholesale company and from now on they'll be getting their merchandise from them. The implication being 'or else.' "

"So Bullington runs the operation in Akron, but the outfit in Cleveland is behind it, right?"

"You called it, friend. The Murray Hill Mob's name is written all over it, but no one could ever prove it in court. They've got a couple of strong-arm boys in the plant at all times, of course."

"There must be money in it, Jack, but it doesn't seem like enough to interest that bunch."

"Believe me there is. The initial setup costs some dough, sure, but not as much as it would cost you or me to do the same thing. Then the material they use for the records is cheap stuff, not the quality that RCA, Columbia, or any big company uses. After a dozen plays a record may start getting scratchy, but so what? Let's say they clear a nickel on every record they peddle. One by a top band or someone like Crosby might sell fifty thousand copies in their territory. A lot wouldn't sell that many, but multiply that nickel by all the records sold and it adds up to real money. And

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you can bet they don't take returns on records that don't sell. Mom and Pop take the hit, not them."

"It's a pretty sleazy way to do business."

Jack laughed at that. "You're expecting ethics from those boys? Get real, buddy."

"How big a territory do they cover?"

"I don't know exactly yet, but it's big. Very, very big. And it's a safe bet that the Akron plant isn't the only one they have."

"So now what? What's Wellington's going to do about it?"

"That's still in the planning stage. You can be sure of one thing, we're going to bust up the operation. That may not put them out of business, but it'll sure hit them where it hurts. I'll make certain you get first crack at the story when it breaks, so keep it under your hat for now."

Jack Eddy was a secretive person. I knew next to nothing about his background other than that he had lived in Indianapolis and graduated from Shortridge High School. And that he was transferred to Akron from the Indianapolis branch of Wellington's National Detective Agency, of course. Aside from that his past was a blank as far as I was concerned.

I had been checking on some of my Irish ancestors and discovered there had been Eddys in Ireland. So I said, "Jack, did your ancestors come over from Ireland?"

He shook his head.

"There were people named Eddy there, you know."

"My ancestors stayed where they were in Cork. The city, I mean. My parents came over and so did I."

I was taken aback. "You mean you were born in Ireland? You don't talk like an Irishman."

"Sure and now didn't I leave when I was five?"

"Now you *are* talking like an Irishman. Are you saying you grew up here and learned to speak American?"

"And isn't that the truth of it, lad? My parents never lost their accents, but I did."

"Do you speak Irish?"

"Gaelic? Yes, a little, although not in everyday conversation. And you, did your ancestors come from Ireland? Geary sounds Irish."

"They did. My paternal grandparents did, that is. In 1849 at the time of the famine. Why did your parents leave?"

"No choice. The Easter uprising in 1916. My father was one of the boys with Michael Collins and the others. He wasn't caught at the time like so many were, but he had to flee. He managed to get back to Cork and, with the help of friends, was able to get on a ship leaving for America. My mother and I followed a month later."

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"It's amazing, Jack. My grandmother was from Clare, but my grandfather was from Cork."

He put his head back and laughed. "And that, my friend, is probably the only thing we have in common."

I was thinking about going to bed the next night when the hallway phone rang. Ivy Bauer was starting to get up from her chair, until I said, "I'll get it." A good thing as it turned out because it was the night desk at the *Times-Press*. "There's been a murder on 18th Street in the Falls, Bram. You'd better get up there."

So much for bed. I cranked up my Hupmobile and headed north. Once across the High Level Bridge and in Cuyahoga Falls I followed 18th Street until I came to a couple of police cars and a crowd gathered in front of a two-story house a little north of Broad Boulevard. By then instinct told me who the victim would be, so I wasn't surprised when a detective told me it was Myron Bullington. He had been shot in the back of the head while on his knees just after parking his car in the driveway. Gangland execution style, with the killer waiting for him to come home after a late night at the plant or, more likely, a couple of hours at a tavern.

I didn't hang around long, knowing that an arrest was a rarity in a professional murder and that small town police were ill-prepared to conduct a real investigation. I was certain that when the Falls detectives learned about Roman Stankowski he would head the list of suspects even though everything about the killing pointed to the mob. When I woke Jack Eddy after returning home, he echoed my thoughts. "And the worst thing about it, buddy, is that Stankowski dropped out of sight a couple of days ago."

My morale was at a low ebb the next few days. Even seeing Sue Baney a couple of times couldn't shake my depression. Where was Stankowski and why had he pulled a disappearing act? Worst of all was the world news. Hitler was demanding a big chunk of Czechoslovakia, and now even Poland wanted some Czech territory. All of Europe was in an uproar, and in Germany, life had become intolerable for the Jews. Now those with Aryan first names had to change them to Israel or Sarah. No matter that Heinrich or Franz had been World War heroes, they now were Israel.

A delegation representing German Jews had gone to a conference of nations in Evian, France, to seek a place for them to emigrate, something Hitler approved of, but it seemed that no one wanted them. Even the United States said only the normal quota of immigrants from Germany and Austria, 27,370, would be

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admitted, and most countries wouldn't go that far. Australia declared, "As we have no real racial problem, we are not desirous of importing one." Intellectuals were especially unwelcome everywhere. Only Holland and Denmark agreed to take all Jews that wanted to come.

What a wonderful world it was. The only good news was that the Japanese army had tried to take over a piece of Soviet territory and the Russians had kicked the daylights out of them and sent them running for home. It was their first major setback in an attempt to take over the entire Far East. But we were all sitting on a powder keg, and with each passing day I had a clearer vision of myself in uniform with a rifle in my hand. I hated the thought.

I decided a hot bath might cheer me up. The pleasurable aroma of Lifebuoy soap was medicinal. It would be my third in a week, but so far Mrs. Bauer hadn't complained. She was waiting outside the bathroom door, though, when I started back to my room. "You've been using too much hot water, Bram. If you keep it up I'll have to raise your rent."

"It won't happen again," I told her, but wanted to ask why the same rule didn't apply to Jack Eddy. I had counted, and he had taken four baths the previous week.

I had joined most of the boarders and three members of the Bauer family in the living room listening to the *Jack Benny Show* on radio one evening when Jack Eddy came in the front door, paused long enough to give me a nod, and then went on upstairs. I followed him to his room when a commercial came on.

"It's set for nine o'clock tomorrow morning, buddy. Join us at the office about half past eight."

"What's set? What's it all about, Jack?"

"We're going to raid the plant on Orleans Avenue, what else?"

"Now wait a minute, Jack. It sounds to me like there might be gunplay."

He shrugged as if to say it didn't matter. To me it did.

"The Akron cops know about it," he said. "I talked to Plato Largis, and he'll be there with some of his boys in blue."

"Any word yet on Roman Stankowski? Will he be there?"

"Not likely. We haven't a clue as to where he is. Neither do the Cuyahoga Falls cops, and like we thought, he's their chief suspect in Bullington's murder."

"Do you think the mob got wise to him hanging around and picked him up? Maybe they're holding him in the recording plant."

"Not a chance. They don't hold on to people, they dispose of

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them like they did Bullington. I would bet, though, that it was Stankowski's poking into their business that somehow made them decide Bullington was a dangerously weak link in the operation."

"Who's running the plant now?"

"One of the strong-arm boys from Cleveland."

"I don't much care for the sound of this, Jack. If you think I want to be in on a reenactment of the gunfight at the O.K. Corral, you're badly mistaken."

Again he shrugged his shoulders. "Doesn't matter to me, friend. Sorry we didn't take your personal safety into account when the plans were drawn up. It'll be a big story, though, but if you want to miss out on it, it's up to you."

He knew I couldn't. That was one of the infuriating things about Jack Eddy. He knew how I felt about being around when bullets started flying, but he didn't care. On the other hand, he knew I had a job to do and was good enough to tip me off with inside information. Personally, though, I would have preferred to rush down there after the shooting ended and get the story that way. But knowing about it ahead of time meant I had to be there from start to finish. If I wasn't and Ben Goldsmith heard about it, I'd be out of a job. I shuddered to think what Sue Baney would say when it was all over. Provided that I was still around to tell her about it. One thing for sure, I wouldn't get much sleep that night.

It began quietly enough on a sunny morning when it was good to be alive but might be difficult to stay that way. I was in Jack's Auburn along with Cliff Austin and Mac McKelvey. We drove to the end of Orleans Avenue and parked around the corner on Cedar, another short street that ended at Orleans. I figured Jack didn't want his car in the line of fire. Cal Andres was at work inside the plant, and another car of Wellington operatives stopped at the far end of Orleans. That group was to work their way around behind the plant.

Foot traffic on Orleans was next to nonexistent, so I knew we would stand out like the proverbial sore thumb. I brought up the rear as we spread out, rounded the corner, and started toward God only knew what. Then, with me already thinking there were too many people on the street for it to look normal, two cars filled with Akron cops careened around the corner off Exchange Street and pulled to the curb with brakes squealing.

Cops poured out onto the street like clowns leaving one of those funny cars at a circus. Some ran around to the loading dock at the side of the plant. Plato Largis was with a group that

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pulled a battering ram from the first car. I watched open mouthed as Jack Eddy ran to join them just as the ram hit the front door with the sound of a Mack truck plowing into a concrete wall at sixty miles an hour. Then the fun began.

Shots rang out as Akron cops and Wellington ops scurried through the doorway. I followed, hesitated outside the door, then went ahead and stepped inside just in time to take a bullet through my hat. Fortunately, the old brown fedora sat high on my head. Even more fortunate was the fact that I stood six three and not six five.

The shooting continued for a minute or so, then an eerie silence fell over the place. Two burly characters in civilian clothes were led past me on the way to a short ride to police headquarters. One clutched his left arm where blood seeped from a bullet wound. Jack Eddy and Plato Largis followed behind but stopped when they saw me examining my hat. Jack pointed to it and said, "Is that a bullet hole?" and then began laughing.

Cliff Austin joined the group in time to say, "Look, an entry wound and an exit wound." They were all laughing as if my narrow escape were some big joke that everyone got except me.

To change the subject I said, "All that shooting and one thug took a bullet in his arm, that was it? I don't think there's going to be any marksmanship awards handed out."

But I was wrong. When we were back on the street we learned that the mobster who had taken over running the plant had bolted out a door onto the loading dock, gun in hand, and was shot dead by an Akron policeman.

Jack Eddy's head was shaking. "It's the worst thing that could have happened. He was our our best bet for tracing this setup back to the mob in Cleveland."

I didn't say so, but I didn't think it came close to being the worst thing that could have happened. I made a few notes, went back inside where cops were starting to haul recording equipment out to the street, made a few more notes, then hurried off on foot to the *Times-Press* building.

The trip took only a couple of minutes, and when I arrived with my bullet-riddled hat on my head, I quickly became a hero. Even Ben Goldsmith was impressed. So much so in fact that he summoned a photographer to take a shot of me with a finger sticking through the entry hole. Then he broke his own rule that a reporter should not be a part of the story by having another man write a short sidebar to go with the front page photo and my banner story on the raid.

In mid afternoon I had a phone call from Sue Baney. "Someone

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just showed me the paper, Bram. You were in on another shootout, weren't you? You know what I told you, you know how I feel about dating a man who is constantly involved in such things. And this time you were shot in the head."

"Not the head, Sue. The hat."

"That's it, Bram. We're finished, through, all washed up. Don't call me again . . . ever." It sounded like another shot when she banged the phone down. It didn't worry me too much because I was sure she would change her mind. Besides, people from other departments were still coming to the newsroom to see the hole in my hat, and I was basking in the glory of it all.

Despite her orders I called Sue Baney that night. As soon as she heard my voice she banged the receiver down again. I felt bad but not too bad because I was the center of attention at the boarding-house. Pretty Kitty Bauer was nowhere to be found, but pudgy Mabel Klosterman broke out in a sweat when she examined the hole in my hat. "Oh, Bram," she said, "you were almost killed." Prim and proper Nora Ferrabee shook her heard while saying, "To think that such things go on right here in town." Mr. Reimer, the retired druggist, said, "My, my, Abraham, you really should be more careful."

Ivy Bauer and her husband, Bus, didn't seem as impressed as the others, and the brat Artie looked at the bullet hole and said, "Aw, that's nothin'. Didn't even draw blood." But it was Jack Eddy who really got under my skin as he stood by watching with a laconic smirk on his face.

Later I followed him up to his room. I said, "No word on Stankowski yet? I thought sure we'd find him locked up somewhere in that plant."

"I can't figure why you'd think that. I don't believe for a minute that the mob has anything to do with his disappearing act. But just for the sake of argument let's say they did. Then why would they have him stashed away down there? If they grab somebody off the street it's the last anybody sees of them, you know that, buddy. They're not in the business of running a jail."

He was right, of course. I had just been trying to look on the bright side. I just didn't get it. Why would Stankowski give Wellington's money to check out the Orleans Avenue plant and then just wander off without waiting to learn the result?

There was good news a couple of days later when Jack Eddy stopped by the newsroom to tell me the gun used to kill Myron Bullington was the one carried by the mobster killed on the loading dock during the raid. "He must have loved that gun, buddy. The procedure called for him to ditch it after shooting Bullington, but he didn't. A stupid jerk, but it gets Stankowski off the hook."

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It was pleasantly cool a week later, so after finishing my afternoon rounds I walked north on Main Street to the Wellington Agency's office in the Metropolitan Building, along the way inhaling the blended aromas of diesel fumes from city buses, rubber from the Goodrich complex, and cereal from the Quaker Oats plant a block west. I arrived just as Jack Eddy was convening a meeting of the operatives. Before he got started I poked my head in the door of his office and said, "Any word yet on Stankowski?"

"Come on in and join the party," he said, winking at the new man, Mac McKelvey. "Nothing on Stankowski, but Mac found Joseph Cermak up in Duluth."

"What?" I said, stunned by the news, then repeated, "What? What are you talking about?"

McKelvey, a thin man as tall as my own six three with a shock of unruly dark hair and a sardonic twist to his mouth for someone only twenty-one years old, said, "He decided he didn't care for Stankowski's life, but figured Cermak's was okay."

"And that's it? He just walked away? And what about those missing fifteen years?"

"Not missing anymore, at least most of them," McKelvey continued. "From the start of the 1925 shipping season Cermak was working on ore boats right up until the *Lewis J. Russell* went down this spring. Never married again, never did much of anything but work, and then during the off season hang around a couple of waterfront bars that were speakeasies back during Prohibition."

It was a tremendous letdown. I had visualized all kinds of scenarios, some involving a life of crime, a few on the romantic side. This was so . . . so routine, so commonplace.

McKelvey was still talking. ". . . but no one would hire him on an ore boat because of his gimpy leg, so he's working for a ship's chandler."

"Then his memory came back? For both lives?"

"Not really," said Jack Eddy. "Or so he says. He's okay on the Stankowski end of it, and Mac kind of rebuilt a memory on the Cermak side for him."

I took a chair in the corner and sat through their bull session, not really paying attention until Cal Andres said, "Jack, did I ever tell you about a couple of boaters I talked to up at Lorain who swear that on foggy nights they saw the *Carty-Jamison No. 2*? Came too close for comfort, both said, and they could read the name clear as a bell."

Oh no, I thought, a ghost ship. As if there weren't enough unanswered questions. The others were laughing, making remarks

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about people with overactive imaginations. Maybe, but I wasn't as sure as they were. It was Lorain where Roman Stankowski had been born. I could see it in my mind, a ghost ship taking one of its sailors home.

When the others had left I turned to Jack and said, "I don't know what to make of it. When you think about it the whole story is kind of crazy. It seemed like such a mystery at first. You know, who he really was, what had happened to his wife and kid, what he had been doing during those years missing from his memory. And now it seems like nothing."

"Come on, buddy, do a little *real* thinking. This survivor of the storms, a not-too-brilliant sailor who somehow managed to live when two ore boats split asunder with him on board comes to town and breaks up a huge record counterfeiting operation, decides the woman he was once married to is a grouchy old shrew with a fifteen-year-old kid who is a foul-mouthed punk, then quietly slips away and goes back to a life he enjoys. You call that nothing?

"You know, friend, I didn't realize you were such a dreamer. You wanted it to turn out that Stankowski was one of the triggermen in the Saint Valentine's Day Massacre, then hooked up with the Dillinger gang to rob a few banks, and all the while was secretly married to Greta Garbo. Now when you find out the truth, which actually is pretty exciting stuff, you find it anticlimactic."

I didn't want to laugh but couldn't help myself. "Put that way, maybe you're right. I can't imagine what Sue Baney's going to say when I tell her about this final development."

"I thought she wasn't having anything more to do with you."

"Oh, she'll come around."

"You think so, huh? If you're right she'll say the same thing she said before. She'll cluck her tongue a few times and say 'that poor lost soul.' "

I laughed again and headed for the door, turned there, and said, "She's right, you know. Stankowski really is a poor lost soul. And now we're never going to know what he really does and doesn't remember about those years."

"The human mind is a funny thing, buddy."

"You can say that again. After all this I don't think mine will ever be the same. But I wonder what Stankowski or Cermak, whatever you want to call him, was doing from the spring of 1923 until the spring of 1925? And what about that ghost ship?"

He grabbed a pencil from his desk and threw it at me. "Get out of here, troublemaker. I've got work to do."

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I wrote a letter to Ernie Pyle briefly outlining the end of the Roman Stankowski story. And every night or two I called Sue Baney, said, "Hello" and then moved the phone a foot from my ear because without fail she slammed the receiver down when she heard my voice. It sounded like someone slapping two boards together.

Was our year-long romance finished? I didn't know the answer any more than I knew what was going to happen with Europe seemingly on the brink of war. And that ghost ship—had those men really seen it, or were they the types that enjoyed stirring the pot just to get a rise out of people? Irishmen like Jack Eddy, maybe. I didn't really believe in such things, and ghost stories didn't do a thing for me. And yet . . .

I took some late evening walks on the gritty streets of East Akron, a little lost, a little lonely. Why, I wondered, did life have to be so complicated?

Solution to the September "Dying Words"

WORD LIST

A. Massaged
B. Almonds
C. Rattletrap
D. Idiotic
E. Lullaby
F. Youthful
G. New Haven
H. Summarize
I. Tarantella
J. Awesome
K. Seconds
L. Idealize
M. Objective
N. Sarasota
O. Philsophy
P. Oklahoma
Q. Tossing
R. Fall guys
S. Ownership
T. Realized
U. Allegheny
V. Mechanical
W. Uncle Sam
X. Rhythmic
Y. Detente
Z. Egotist
AA. Rotate

QUOTATION

Author—MARILYN STASIO
Work—SPOT FOR MURDER
—The *New York Times*, December 25, 2005

"The setting of a P. D. James novel is always the key to the mystery. Whether it's a theological college . . . an ancient abbey . . . or a small museum . . . a murder committed in such a hallowed place poses . . . a puzzle for . . . Adam Dalgliesh . . . It signals another assault on an orderly civilization."

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STREET JUSTICE

FRANK T. WYDRA

The black and gold cruiser crawled through the dark underbrush of the city with the grace of a panther. This neighborhood, half the homes demolished, those still standing, a third abandoned, good only as dope dens. Streetlamps shot out, so the only illumination came from the moon and the halo of the nearby downtown. Second time around the block, nothing seemed to move, not even the shadows hidden within shadows. Then Rollo, riding shotgun, growled, "There, on that porch."

Kenny Kozlov, handling the wheel, blinked to better see through the chiaroscuro night. From the cut weeds in the front lawn, the house Rollo pointed at looked to be one of the few places where someone lived.

"That kid," Rollo's voice now down below his knees, "been watching us. See how he pulls back, like now. Trying to hide. He's pushing. Go around once more. Next time, cut the lights before we make the turn, see if we can spot the action."

Kenny nodded and kept the cruiser steady at fifteen, as if all were normal. They were out of their territory, but Rollo had called dispatch and reported that their turf was quiet, volunteering to do a circuit around some of the bad spots. No argument from Washington, the watch commander, and here they were.

Roland Macero, Rollo to his friends, was an old line bulldog: twenty years on the force, all street duty, most of it graveyard shift when the slime cats prowled. Far as Kenny could tell, it was the life for which he'd been born. Try to cover his lap with a desk, within a month the nervous energy would go nuclear. In some ways, for Kenny, Rollo was what being a cop was all about: sensing evil, catching perps, herding them off the street so that the gentle folk could leave their doors unlocked at night. Never going to happen, but year and a quarter out of the academy that was the fantasy.

First nine months behind the badge Kenny had bumped from cruiser to cruiser on temporary duty, TDY, never pulling more than two weeks with the same guy. Then six months ago, Rollo's

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sidekick had taken early out, and Kenny's number came up for the slot. For Kenny, Rollo was top of the class, but that first day, when the duty roster came out, Rollo had said, "You're TDY, right?"

"N-no," Kenny stammered. After the rookie slush he had taken on the rotation, he expected welcome arms on this, his first permanent gig. The sneer on Rollo's face said otherwise. A half dozen blues, including Krannert, the admin sergeant who'd made the assignment, stood around catching the act, somehow knowing it was a laugher.

"I'm no wet nurse. You're TDY. Krannert, what's this shit?"

Krannert, propping the wall, arms folded, big "say cheese" grin on his face, said, "Watch your mouth. Boy's a comer. Year, tops, he'll make lieutenant. Figured you'd want to be on his good side. Teach him the tricks." All the blues yuk-yukked.

Rollo's eyes flicked around, as if checking who was in on the joke, then he pawed the air in disgust and pushed a finger toward Kenny's face. "You got a week."

That first day, although Kenny tried a half dozen times to make words, Rollo seemed to have his lips stapled shut. Next day, the bull surprised him by saying, "You ask to ride with me?"

Kenny shook his head. "Luck of the draw."

"Draw? Krannert's gag, more like it."

Kenny nodded, not wanting to look at Rollo. "I that bad?"

"You're a rookie. Stuff I do, need solid backup. No time to wet nurse." Rollo had the wheel, doing forty down Michigan Avenue, but that didn't stop him from swiveling his head to Kenny. "What you know about me?"

Kenny had heard a lot but said, "Not much. Some say you're a Dirty Harry type, Pied Piper of the street. Toot your flute, the rats follow you out of town."

"Who's talking this shit?"

"It's around."

"They'd be better off keeping their mouths shut."

Scuttle was, six years ago Rollo had taken out a perp who turned out to be short on hardware, a third-rate hood, sheet an inch thick, including armed robbery and assault with a deadly, though on that particular night the bad boy was not carrying. Two other blue suits who witnessed the action gave deps saying they thought the perp was reaching. Still, there was a six-month suspension while Internal Affairs shouldered the grindstone of justice. In the end, Rollo got a clean bill.

To someone on the outside, six months off with pay might sound like fat city. But "with pay" means a standard, vanilla check: no overtime, no special duty, no free donuts from the local diner,

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not enough for most cops to live on. Gospel was, six months on straight pay put you a month in hock. Since then Rollo had gotten three citations for taking out perps, every one of them armed, plus more cuffings in a month than most street fighters got in a year. To Kenny, Academy Award performance. "Hey, guy's good, people talk."

Rollo gave him another look, but the hint of a smile was also there.

The third day, Rollo tossed Kenny the keys, saying, "I'm tired of doing all the work."

Two guys, riding together all day, either talk or go to war. Once past yakking about the Pistons, Red Wings, Lions, Tigers, deer hunting, what a jerk the mayor was, how the union wasn't doing shit, it being too cold, too hot, too rainy, too snowy, what was left was the personal stuff: religion, politics, and family. To Kenny, religion was as dry as toast. End of the second week, Kenny figured Rollo tagged anyone with hair longer than a crew cut to be a bed-wetting Commie. Bring up anything more liberal than peanut butter and jelly, Rollo'd go into a rant. So Kenny cooled the politics. It took until the fifth week for them to get into family.

"You married?" Rollo asked as they cruised West Grand, checking the topless joints, party stores, and sex shops.

Kenny, now a fixture behind the wheel, said, "Seeing someone. Nothing serious."

"Keep it that way. Mistake I made fifteen years ago, getting serious, figuring there was something to that marriage stuff. Got this kid, just turned sixteen. Thinks she knows everything." Kenny glanced over, and Rollo was looking straight ahead, as if he were saying this for his own benefit. "Some advice. You get married, do what the Chinese do, have one kid and make sure it's a boy."

"So this daughter of yours, she have a name?"

"Louise. Sweet Louise." Kenny could feel the glow in Rollo's face. "Used to bounce her on my knee. Never figured she'd be into lip piercing, tattoos, and that shit. Where do they get this stuff?"

"You and the mother still together?"

Rollo pursed his lips and shook his head. "Not for ten years. Me and her can't stand each other." Rollo leaned over and picked up the transmitter. "Unit twelve here. Slow going in our sector. Any you girls having a rough night?"

The radio crackled. Woman's voice. "Ten-four. Unit forty-seven. Ah, we're tied down with some family business. You want to buzz our turf, we'd appreciate. And, so you know, cut the sexist crap."

Rollo gave Kenny a wink. "Ten-four. Sarge, you buy it?"

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Bernie Washington, the watch supervisor, came back, "Ten-four. Go to it."

It was what Rollo did on slow nights, go out looking for trouble. Also, seemed to Kenny, a good way to change the subject.

A month passed before Rollo brought up the kid again. This time, the night after Kenny had introduced him to the looker he was seeing, nurse by the name of Katie.

"Good-looking girl, that Katie. Woman I married looked that good once. After a while, though, she turned mean, always ragging about how I'm never home, always working or having a beer. No matter how good a looker, once they start nagging, my eyes, they're ugly. Only thing kept me around was the kid, just going into school when I left."

Kenny did the math. Six, seven years. Long time to stay in purgatory. "Kid must be something."

Rollo gave him a long look, one that seemed to say it was the stupidest thing he'd ever heard. "Something, now. Got her old lady's looks, but innocent and not mean. Trouble is, my ex don't know how to raise a kid, lets her do what she wants. Getting wild."

"See her much?"

"Weekends. Every other holiday. Not enough time to set her straight. What I'd like, she rides with me for a week, sees these dregs, understands what happens when road you're on takes a bad turn, something like that'd straighten her out."

"Kids now are pretty smart, know what's up."

Another one of those looks. "Yeah, right." End of conversation.

For Kenny, riding with Rollo was like taking a graduate-level course in street justice. Cold days he brought the hookers hot coffee; street fights he cleared with a rap from his baton; guy beats his woman, a trip to the alley; sticky pushers lost their stuff to the sewer; hot contraband got sent back to the owner or delivered to the Salvation Army. Way Rollo put it, "Who's getting hurt?"

But that troubled Kenny. For him, the book was the book. "What about due process?"

Rollo gave him one of those looks. "You're watching too much TV. This is real world. Take 'em in, they get a release and a record. These punks to learn, got to be consequences. Take 'em in, what do they learn, answer me that, what do they learn? Nothing. They let 'em go fast as we bring 'em in. Revolving door. Out here, *I'm* the consequences."

Kenny shook his head. "You're something, man."

That gave Rollo a big smile.

Other side of the coin were the people Rollo called the bad guys—perps who sold candy to sixth graders or smack to anyone,

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scum who did the rape thing or played at sex with kids, dumbshits who didn't get the message in the alley, and anyone with a gun. Perps who, when they went in, wouldn't get out. These he cuffed. But before running them in, nine times out of ten he took them up on contempt of cop charges—making sure there were no cameras running when he applied the sentencing.

Once, with the perp in the back cage with two black eyes, broken nose and ribs, Kenny said, "Man, you can't do that. They catch you, it's your badge."

"Guy was resisting. SOB's peddling blow to grade-school kids, we collar him, and he resists. Way it was."

Way Kenny saw it, no kids around, Rollo flashed the badge, the creep ran. Rollo chased him down, clubbed him to the ground, and put a steel toe to the ribs and face. But they'd been watching this one for a week and knew he was into something. Kenny nodded, said, "Way it was."

For all of Rollo's brand of street justice, never once did Kenny see him pocket a nickel or do mean for mean's sake. End of day, their circuit had fewer majors than any other ride. Still, the rough justice left Kenny with an odd feeling. Not the way it was supposed to be done. But then, Rollo was Rollo, the cop's cop, and Kenny was just one class removed from being a rookie.

Twice they got a call with high odds the perp was armed. Both times Rollo reached into his off-duty bag and slipped a Saturday night special, H&R snub-nosed thirty-two, into the back of his belt and examination gloves into his pocket before exiting the cruiser. First time, Kenny asked afterward, "What's that all about?"

"Nothing you need to worry about," Rollo told him, slipping the piece back into the off-duty bag.

He let it sit, but a week later, they were sampling the goods at a Dunkin' Donuts and out of the clear Rollo said, "That extra piece I carry, that's insurance. One of these times, a bad guy is going down a little light on hardware. That happens, not going to be a question of whether he's packing or not. For me, next time, there is no next time."

For a while Kenny didn't say anything, thinking it over, remembering the story of Rollo on the beach for six months with straight pay before getting cleared. Thinking about his bringing coffee for the whores and settling with wife beaters in the alley; thinking about his being a clean cop when it came to graft. Thinking his partner had some odd ways that seemed to work even if they weren't all in the book. Thinking Rollo ever had to use the snub nose there would be a dead man on the floor. Thinking that happened, how's the perp going to learn from the consequences?

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Thinking somehow, the old grade-school thing of two wrongs not making it right ate at him. Then he said, "Thanks for mentioning it. Want to take some java for the girls?"

Rollo gave him a slow look, then a small snort, and said, "Naw, slow night. Let's see if we can do some good. Boys in the fifth usually need help."

Once, after they had finished agreeing that the Lions wouldn't win another one this season, Rollo pulled his wallet and showed Kenny a picture of Louise. Kenny had to admit she was going to be a looker, not just saying it to make his partner feel good, but because she had the bones. Eyes alone would make a saint sin. "You believe she's sixteen?" Rollo said. "Could pass for twenty any day."

And he was right. She had none of the little-girl-innocent look you'd expect of a kid. "She doing okay now?"

Rollo shook his head, looking long at the picture before sliding the wallet back into his pocket. "Mixed up with some bad ones. I talk to her, but sixteen, who listens to the old man?"

Give Rollo another four inches and he could be a linebacker for the Chicago Bears, so Kenny had trouble getting his head around the "old man" thing. Something in the image bubbled up and came out as a snort.

Rollo scowled, "You think it's funny?"

Kenny shook his head, waving a hand to drop Rollo's blood pressure. "The 'old man,' couldn't see you as the old man, like you were helpless or something. So, this bad crowd, what we talking here?"

"Couple of punks. Other side of town, must have four years on her. Rings in their noses, tattoos, pants hanging down to show the crack in their ass, seems like they never saw a shower, not the crowd I want her running with."

"So why not talk with them, you're good at settling things."

It was Rollo's turn to snort. "Tried that. Kid named J. J. Mex, I think. Went out to see him. Gave him good advice. Told him, stay clear. He laughed, said Lulu, that's what he called her, Lulu, was legal tender. Said keep my nose out of it. I backed him against the wall, knocked his head around a few times, figured he'd get my drift. Damn if he didn't rat me out to Louise. Now she's pissed."

Kenny smiled. The kid had this tough old bull right around her finger. "Give her a week. That age, it's hard to hold a grudge."

"Who're you, Dr. Phil?"

"My opinion."

They didn't say much to each other rest of the shift.

Now here they were, turning another slow night into missionary

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work on someone else's beat. The kid who'd been standing in the shadows bolted, rabbiting it into the house. Rollo, snub nose and gloves somehow already out of the off-duty bag, swung the cruiser's door open and went after him, yelling for Kenny to cover the back. Kenny pulsed the scanner, saying, "Unit twelve, foot pursuit, Avon and Beech," not waiting for the dispatcher to acknowledge, cutting the squelch to mute the scanner.

He was no more than halfway around the house when a shot cut the night air, dead space, then two more tumbled after it. To his ear, all came from the same piece, but he didn't trust his ear and wondered whether the perp had opened on Rollo.

Whatever, he had to get in there fast. That point on, things seemed to blur, to go slow motion. Every sense seemed electric, as if the smallest movement were being recorded and stored in his own personal video cam. Stumbling, service piece now drawn, he reached the back stairs that led to a little porch. Time slipped back to normal and the cam switched off. Kenny, disoriented by the warp, stood there for a few seconds, unsure of whether to wait in ambush or bust the door. Bust the door won. He keyed his scanner, pulsed the mute off, then remembered that Rollo had once ragged on him about keeping the damn thing off for close-in work. "Thing'll get you killed," he'd said. "Noise it makes, might as well shine a spot." He slipped the scanner back to his belt. No light from the grated windows. The door looked as if it were metal with just a peephole at eye height. Standing to one side, he tried the doorknob and it turned easily. A small push and it arced slowly open. Crouching, he swung into the opening, fanning his police issue from side to side, looking for movement, finding none. He stepped to the right, taking himself away from the light frame of the door.

The layout of the house was typical of those built in the thirties and forties. Living room on one side facing the street, kitchen behind it on the alley side, two bedrooms separated by a single bath on the other side, all connected by a small hall. There was a glow coming from the hall indicating a light in one of the bedrooms.

Kenny, still in his crouch, called, "Rollo?"

"In here."

Straightening, still wary, holding his piece double handed in front of him, he moved toward the hall. The light came from the front bedroom. Rollo, his back toward the door, kneeled over a body, the only part of which Kenny could see were two akimbo, poor-boy-pants-covered legs. Rollo seemed to be working the body, first aid, Kenny thought. Whatever had been going on, it was

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over; Rollo's service issue was back in its holster, and the air in the room was as calm as a Moonie retreat.

"Son of a bitch pulled on me," Rollo said. "Call the meat wagon."

Rollo's left arm came up, followed by a thump. The perp's arm hit the floor, and a snub-nosed revolver skittered across the wood. Kenny watched it slide under a chest of drawers. Rollo, who's head had also turned to watch the piece do its pirouette, saw him and said, "You still here?"

Kenny started toward the chest of drawers. "Leave it," Rollo commanded.

"Yeah," Kenny said, "What happened?"

"What's it look like? He pulled on me. End of story, his story." Rollo gave him a sharp look. "Call that wagon."

Kenny clicked the talk button on his scanner. "Shots fired, shots fired; Avon and Beech; man down; need medical examiner. Lock me down. Need crime scene ASAP and tape up around the house." He knew that by using medical examiner instead of medical assistance the sharp ones would assume the perp was dead.

Central dispatch came back, "Ten-four unit twelve; shots fired, man down, Avon and Beech, medical examiner dispatched." There was immediate chatter on the line with other units breaking in, signaling readiness to assist.

Washington broke in, "Unit forty-seven en route to assist. Tape off the area. Dispatch, notify CID."

Central responded, "Ten-four. Unit forty-seven en route to scene received. CID notified."

Kenny read the hesitation on the other end, knowing Washington wanted to know how in the hell they'd wound up out of their territory with shots fired and a dead man, but since everything was recorded, Sarge was smart enough not to ask.

Kenny had turned away during the call and now, as he turned back, saw Rollo's hand coming out of the dead man's jacket pocket. "You get an ID yet," he asked.

Rollo held up a gloved hand holding a wallet. "Like I figured, a punk." He stood, giving Kenny a hard look. "You saw it all. His running was probable cause. He reached. I got him first. Piece with his prints on it and all." His eyes flicked to the chest of drawers. "Once he was down, we did a quick search." He held out his hand, which had a couple of small plastic bags of white powder. "Looks like H to me. Guy's a peddler."

Kenny knew what was happening. Rollo was feeding him the party line, making sure when statements were made, the same message would get taken down no matter who was doing the talking. He nodded. "Way it was."

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Rollo smiled. "Way it was."

He took the wallet from Rollo's hand and pulled out the driver's license. Juarez Jones, age twenty, same widow's peak and thin black mustache as the stiff on the floor. No earring in the driver's license picture, but the tattoo on his neck was there. He thought about the three shots: bam, pause, bam, bam. Jones here has one in him, he'd be on the floor, no reason for the other two. Unless the first one wasn't a stopper, and Jones was bringing the piece up on Rollo. Could be. Cannon Rollo used, though, stop an elephant. He said, "Funny, he should make a turn, bolt into this here bedroom, instead of going straight through, hoofing it out the back."

Rollo's eyes narrowed and he cocked his head to one side, "Yeah. Must've heard you out there, covering. Smart of you to point that out. Probably figured he'd dive through the window. You and me, we'd be holding vapor. That's the thing, these guys, they're not smart, but trap 'em, they're like rats, figure some way to get out."

Again, feeding him his lines, covering bases, knowing Kenny could not have been more than halfway to the back when the shots were fired. Now thinking, guy's running, why'd he turn to take the lead? Why not just keep going for the window? "This guy, you know him?"

Rollo gave him one of those hard looks with his eyes narrowed, but Kenny could see the hint of a smile force its way onto his face. "What you talking?"

"Out of our territory, Mex guy, initials, J. J., earrings, tattoos, seems like I heard about this guy somewhere."

"You're thinking too hard."

The backup units wailed their way to the curb, and Rollo moved to the front of the house. Kenny flipped through Jones's wallet. A little plastic sleeve held a picture of a wide-eyed sixteen-year-old beauty-to-be, looking as good in this one as she had in the other. Sloppy of Rollo to leave it there. Not like him. He fished the photo out of the sleeve, put it in his pocket, and tossed the wallet back on J. J.'s body. He could hear Rollo out front telling it like it was. Almost. Street justice, he thought, and reached under the chest of drawers, fished out the H&R snub-nosed thirty-two, and slipped it into the place between his belt and the small of his back, covered the piece with his jacket, thinking, Sorry, Rollo, got to be consequences.

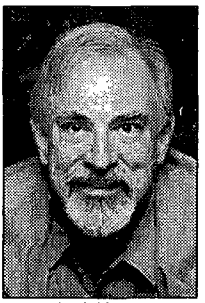
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REEL CRIME

STEVE HOCKENSMITH

In the new thriller *Death Sentence* (opening August 31), an average Joe (Kevin Bacon) becomes a gun-toting vigilante after criminals brutally murder one of his loved ones.

If that sounds a lot like the seminal seventies revenge flick *Death Wish*, there's a good reason. Like *Death Wish*, *Death Sentence* is based on a novel by Brian Garfield. And not only was the novel *Death Sentence* written as a sequel to *Death Wish*, it represented something much more, as far as Garfield was concerned: atonement.



Brian Garfield

"It was penance for the movie," Garfield says. "The point of *Death Wish* was supposed to be that vigilantism doesn't work. It's not a solution, it's just another problem. But then the film came out, and it was amazing the way people reacted to it. There were people standing up on their seats in the theaters, yelling, 'Yeah! Kill that mother!' "

While the film *Death Wish* stuck close to the plotline of Garfield's novel, Garfield's point was obviously lost in translation. But now with *Death Sentence*, the opposite is true: The story's been changed considerably, but Garfield thinks the message is right on target.

That hews a lot closer to the *Death Wish* adaptation that almost got the green light three-plus decades ago. The film was originally intended to be a black-and-white psychodrama helmed by directing heavyweight Sidney Lumet *(Network, Dog Day Afternoon)* and starring an actor who would never have been mistaken for an action hero: Jack Lemmon. But when Charles Bronson took over the lead role, everything changed—and a franchise was born.

"I think I saw all of number two, and after that I was too disgusted [to watch any more], so I've just seen bits and pieces of the others," Garfield says of the four *Death Wish* sequels that were made between 1982 and 1994. "I had only one thing to do with them, and that was that I had to threaten to sue the producers to get paid."

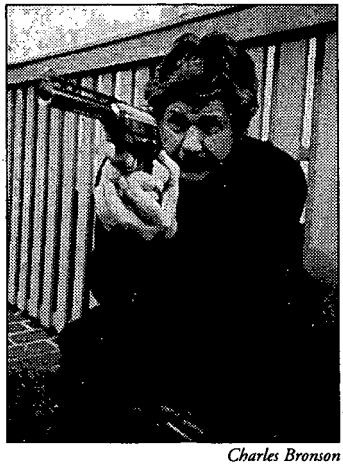
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Kevin Bacon in Death Sentence. © *HPE Rights, Inc.; photo by Jim Bridges*

Fortunately, Garfield's had a decidedly cozier relationship with the producers behind *Death Sentence*. In fact, he penned the first few drafts of the screenplay himself. And though writer Ian Mackenzie Jeffers ended up with solo script credit, Garfield's not complaining.

"They didn't use anything of mine except the original idea," says the novelist (who, as of press time, had yet to see a cut of the film). "But the shooting script reads really well. I'd be happy to put my name on it, but it wasn't mine."



Charles Bronson

Garfield also gives his stamp of approval to the film's director . . . even though friends warned him that his already dark, bloody tale was about to become a lot darker and a lot bloodier.

Death Sentence director James Wan is best known as the wunderkind behind the brutal *Saw* films, in which a sadistic kidnapper uses fiendish contraptions to test, torture, and kill his captives. Wan directed and cowrote the first *Saw* movie when he was just twenty-six, and he's served as executive producer on two (soon to be three) sequels.

"Everybody kept telling me *Saw* is this gory, violent, awful film, but I didn't find it that way," Garfield says. "I find it surprisingly restrained compared to a lot of the chainsaw things

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James Wan and Cary Elwes on the set of Saw. © *Lions Gate Films*

that tend to dominate [the suspense/horror] genre. I thought it was quite an intelligent movie, actually. It was not plausible, but it kept you on the edge of your seat."

Garfield certainly has more faith in Wan than he did in *Death Wish* director Michael Winner. He calls Winner's approach "sloppy" and says he regrets that the 1974 film wasn't "more responsible."

Which probably explains why Garfield later took matters into his own hands when one of his favorite books was turned into a movie: He coscripted and produced the 1980 spy caper *Hopscotch* (based on his Edgar-winning novel of the same name). The resulting film—memorably starring a Golden Globe-nominated Walter Matthau as a curmudgeonly CIA agent out to embarrass his paper-pushing superiors—was a hit with critics and moviegoers alike. But not every adaptation turned out so well.

"*Death Wish* made me bankable, so I started selling movies left and right," recalls Garfield (who wrote Westerns under a number of different names before hitting it big in the crime genre). "And some of them weren't very good."

Garfield's Western *The Last Hard Men* became a Sam Peckinpah-style exercise in ultra violence, for instance, while his suspense novel *Necessity* was the basis for a CBS movie of the week, starring master thespian Loni Anderson. (It wasn't just Garfield's books that made the jump to the screen, by the way: His short story "Scrimshaw" was turned into a 1985 episode of the

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syndicated series *Tales of the Unexpected* . . . after first appearing in *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine.)*

In 1987, Garfield had one more modest success as a mini movie mogul: He produced the microbudgeted thriller *The Stepfather,* which won a cult following (and spawned two sequels), thanks largely to a mesmerizing performance by Terry O'Quinn *(Lost)* as a very bad dad. (The twisty script by Garfield pal—and living legend—Donald E. Westlake certainly didn't hurt.)

"*Death Wish* made me bankable, so I started selling movies left and right."

But as the eighties wound down, Garfield found himself losing interest in Tinseltown.

"It was fun [producing movies], but I've got to say that writing books is much more satisfying in the long run," he says. "A film belongs to the two or three hundred people who made it. They all own a little piece of it. But a book—that's all yours."

Not that Garfield was anxious to get back to churning out page-turning novels. From the late eighties on, he devoted himself largely to environmental causes and research-heavy nonfiction projects. His 1989 book *Manifest Destiny* explored Theodore Roosevelt's years as a young cattle rancher (and might soon become a TV miniseries starring Steve *"Sahara"* Zahn as Teddy, if all goes according to plan.) And this spring saw the publication of *The Meinertzhagen Mystery,* Garfield's biography of the flamboyant English scientist, soldier, spy, and compulsive liar who helped inspire Ian Fleming's 007.

That last project required ten years of research in locations around the world. So Garfield can be forgiven for taking it easy these days. He's currently working on two new books, but neither one is likely to be as exhaustive—or exhausting—as the Meinertzhagen bio. One's a thriller he says he can write "off the top of my head." The other . . . well, that one's a little harder to pin down.

"It's . . . I don't know what to call it," admits the sixty-eight-year-old author, who splits his time between homes in Los Angeles and Santa Fe. " 'Family memoir' is the phrase that comes to mind. It's not about me. It's about my mother, father, uncles. They lived in a fascinating time among fascinating people. My mother was an artist, for example—a protégé of Georgia O'Keefe's. And I'm the only member of that group still alive, so I should probably put this down on paper while I can."

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TOO COLD A TRAIL

BIRNEY DIBBLE

At first the young lady's suggestion didn't make much sense. She wanted Detective Michael Cellini to convince his chief to reopen a murder case that had been closed—unsolved—fifty years ago. He said as much to her.

"But, Detective Cellini, she died a Jane Doe back in the *mid fifties!* Think of the advances in detection since then. Like facial reconstruction. Like DNA testing. Like, oh, I know I'm preaching to the choir when I say that . . ."

They'd been talking for half an hour. Her name was Nancy Lentz. She was a newspaper reporter with a strong interest in local history. She was also a member of a group that went to cemeteries to reenact the highlights of the life of the deceased. They called the short skit "Meet the Spirits." Recently she had gone up to Forest Hill, the big cemetery that overlooks Half Moon Lake in the middle of the city of Eau Claire, to celebrate and participate in the reenactment of the life of a young woman doctor. Near the new grave she spotted a small headstone with this inscription:

JANE DOE
APRIL 1955
AGE ABOUT 20 YEARS

She was intrigued. Back in her newspaper's morgue (dead newspapers, not people), in just a matter of minutes she found the story in a stack of yellowed newspapers.

Two high school boys had found her body. It was a warm Saturday in late May. They had ridden their bikes down an old dirt tote road that had been bulldozed to log the mixed pine and popple trees. They parked their bikes where the road ended near the Chippewa River and fished for a couple of hours. About noon they returned to their bikes, got their brown bag lunches from their backpacks, found a couple of stumps to sit on, and ate their lunches. After lunch one of them walked into the woods a short distance to relieve himself and almost stumbled over the body.

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Tim Foley

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Dr. Ralph Regent, the Sacred Heart Hospital pathologist who did the autopsy, informed the police that she had been dead about a week and was almost certainly still alive when she was dumped. Her skull, left arm, and several ribs were fractured. Her body was blackened from multiple bruises. She was 5-foot-3 and weighed 104 pounds. She was about twenty years old. Her hair was strawberry blond. She was naked and wore no jewelry.

Animals had eaten so much of her face that her own mother wouldn't have been able to identify her. And her fingers had been so chewed on that no fingerprints could be taken. Dental records, even if they could be found, would be of no help because she had never had any cavities filled. In her hair she had three bobby pins that she could have bought in any one of thousands of stores in the country. And that was it, as far as identification was concerned.

There was all kinds of stuff found near the body. People had just taken their junk on a dark night and dumped it at the end of the tote road, rather than pay to have it carted away or to take it to a landfill. There were bottles, a smashed bicycle, an old sofa, a rusted toolbox filled with rusted tools, a headlamp, an old-fashioned icebox, a more modern but obviously nonworking refrigerator, several mattresses with holes where mice lived or borrowed stuffing for their burrows. And on and on and on. But nothing that came close to being a clue to the girl's murderer.

Murders in the area in the mid fifties weren't all that common; the story was front page news there and across the state. Some kind soul sent a bouquet of red gladioli with a note, "For Someone's Daughter." No missing girls of Jane Doe's description had been reported locally, so it was assumed by the police that she'd been brought to Eau Claire from elsewhere, but there were no clues as to where that might be. The police reviewed the reports of missing girls from around the country, but none described their Jane Doe.

When one newspaper article stated that Jane Doe was to be buried in a pauper's grave, donations poured in to buy a private cemetery plot. The necessary sum of ninety-five dollars was quickly raised. Stokes and Sons embalmed her pro bono and donated a coffin, and florists at 4 Seasons donated roses and sweet peas to cover it. The pastor at the Lake Street Methodist Episcopal Church offered to handle the funeral service, and promised to make it nondenominational. Over thirty people came to bid farewell to a young girl none of them had known. Or, it should be said, *presumably* no one there knew her. The following day a front page picture of the graveside ceremony showed the men wearing suits and snap-

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brim fedoras, the women wearing dresses and pillbox hats.

Nancy Lentz said to Cellini now, "Won't you at least talk to Chief Wistrom?"

He smiled. "Sure. Hard to turn down a request from a pretty young lady." And she was pretty, he thought. Too young to be beautiful. She was twenty-five maybe. "I'll talk to him and get back to you."

She jumped up from her chair with a smile that Cellini called a Pepsodent smile, which certainly dated him. "Oh, thank you!" she cried and dashed out.

Cellini retrieved the file on the murder, a bit amazed that it was still available. He hadn't even been born then. He sat back down in his swivel chair with his feet on the desk, his favorite position for thinking, and studied the file carefully. He read the high school boys' statements, the pathologist's autopsy report, the coroner's jury's decision, the list of junked objects found at the scene. There was a scrawled addendum stating that the newspapers had not been given a complete list of what was found at the scene.

There were also faded red arrows pointing to two sentences that described two items that had not been released to the press: In her uterus was a three-month-old male fetus, and she had a transverse scar in the right lower quadrant of her abdomen, which was probably from an appendectomy.

They'd been thorough, he could see. He could also see why they'd had to close the case without solving it. Oh, it looked like they really had tried to find something. Two officers had been assigned full time for the better part of a month, tracking down every little scrap of information. They'd checked people who lived nearby to see if they'd seen anything unusual during the previous week. "Yah," one old farmer had said, "I seen something unusual. That jackpine savage next door" (half a mile away) "shot at my dog and durn near kilt him. Ufta!" And there had been some shots fired perhaps a mile from where the body was found, but the person who'd heard it figured it was deer shiners getting some "woods beef."

No one reported seeing any vehicles that they didn't recognize as belonging to local residents.

Cellini thought that maybe the police could do something now. They'd have to exhume the body, of course, and that would cost money, which the chief would almost certainly veto. In his interview with Nancy, he'd pointed that out. She countered with the idea of asking for donations from the general public, just like they did fifty years ago. She had it all figured out.

He worked at his desk for a couple of hours, clearing up enough paperwork that he thought he could take some time off and speak to Chief Wistrom about Jane Doe.

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To his surprise, the chief had no objections if they didn't have to use taxpayers' money for a project that was likely to fail.

He called Nancy later in the day and got her voicemail. He left a message. She called back while he was out of the office and left a message. Phone tag. But her message was short and to the point: "I'll get right on it."

And she did. Within a week she had raised three thousand six hundred dollars, which was more than enough to cover the cost of the exhumation, the DNA tests on the remains, if they ever found any relatives, and the fee for a facial reconstructionist to create a three-dimensional sculpture of what Jane Doe might have looked like. A picture of the sculpture would then be circulated widely, with the hope that someone somewhere would recognize the girl.

A month later Cellini stood with Nancy Lentz, Chief Wistrom, and a couple of dozen other people at the grave of Jane Doe. A backhoe stood nearby. The chief asked for a moment of silence. Then the backhoe started excavating the coffin of a young woman murdered fifty years ago. Nancy said to Cellini in a quiet voice, "Fifty years ago a couple of dozen people gathered here to bury Jane Doe. Now we're here to dig her up. In both cases it's because some people cared and wondered who she was."

It took two days to complete the exhumation, retrieve the remains, and transfer them to the proper people. They chose as the reconstructionist a man in Minneapolis with a superb track record, a young Korean American by the name of Bae Lee. Cellini had never seen a reconstruction like this, so he made the two-hour drive from Eau Claire to watch him work.

Lee placed the skull on his turntable in what he called the Frankfort Horizontal position. He knew that the girl was white, approximately twenty years old, and was lean almost to the point of being skinny. With that information he could gauge the proper tissue depth data. He used about twenty-five short white tissue markers that looked like stubs of cigarettes of different lengths and glued them directly to the skull. Most of them lay over prominent bones like the cheek and jaw. Because she was known to have been blond, he placed blue-tinted artificial eyeballs in the sockets and centered them carefully at the proper depth.

Bae Lee had already noted the report of the forensic anthropologist as to lack of knowledge of Jane Doe's lifestyle, where she lived, or anything else. So he had little to go on there. "Sometimes," he reflected, "that's helpful in such things as determining the thickness of the fat tissue between skin and bone in cases where all the soft tissue is gone." But he started applying clay directly on the skull, following its contours, and paying strict attention to the

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tissue markers. Cellini stayed for a few hours, fascinated by the artist at work. The guy really knew his stuff, Cellini mused to himself. Lee had just made a good start when Cellini left, but Cellini could already detect the general appearance of the girl's face.

Ten days later, Cellini received half a dozen photographs of the reconstructed head, taken from various angles. He studied them for a few moments, muttering under his breath about how real the sculpture looked. Then he jumped to his feet and strode rapidly to Chief Wistrom's office. The chief took one look and said, "Good Lord, she looks like she's about to say something!"

"Yeah," Cellini said. "Wish it would be her name."

"Get these out to every fax machine in every police station, library, and post office within a five hundred–mile radius."

"Yes, sir!"

It was near the end of a long day for Helen Rush. She was the senior librarian in Centerville's little library and would be retiring in three months after almost forty years of service. She leaned back in her swivel chair with a deep sigh. Her oldest son wanted her to leave Little Egypt, the area around Cairo at the far southern tip of Illinois, and move closer to him in Springfield. Now that Cecil was gone, maybe that would be a good thing. She tapped the blunt end of her felt pen against her teeth and sighed again. She would hate to leave her cozy little home on the lake just a few miles outside of town. Well, she thought, there's no hurry to make up my mind.

The fax machine behind her chattered and she could hear it kick out three sheets of paper. Idly, she spun in her chair and reached for the printouts. The top page had on it two pictures of the modeled head of a very pretty young girl, a profile and a frontal view. The girl's lips curled slightly at the corners in a winsome smile.

Helen gazed thoughtfully at the pictures for several moments, thinking that the girl looked vaguely familiar. Then she turned to the second sheet and read, "This girl was found dead at the end of a remote logging road in a dense new-growth forest near the city of Eau Claire, Wisconsin, more than fifty years ago. No identification was possible because . . ." It said she had blue eyes and reddish blond hair. Helen read the brief sketch of the investigation, the exhumation, and the recent reconstruction of the face. Then on the third sheet she read the plea from the Eau Claire police department for anyone who had any information, or thought they recognized the girl, to get in touch with the department.

Helen tossed the sheets onto her desk and studied the face once

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more. Yes. Colleen. Colleen Tichna. She disappeared one night. She'd gone to a movie and just didn't come home. But could that have been fifty years ago? It didn't seem possible. But, yes again. Everyone, including her parents, sister, teachers, and the police had agreed that she hadn't run away. There were no clothes or suitcases missing; she'd had no serious arguments with her parents. She didn't drink alcohol. The consensus was that she'd been abducted.

Helen knew that Margaret, Colleen's younger sister, still lived here in town. Helen hadn't seen her for years. She was a few years older than Helen, which would put her in her early seventies.

She pondered a moment, remembering that terrible week when half the village roamed the back roads and trails looking for any kind of a clue. Nothing had ever been found. There were no witnesses, no suspects, no arrests. She had a boyfriend with a hair-trigger temper who'd hit her more than once, but he had an absolutely air-tight alibi and was exonerated early on.

Helen looked away from the pictures, trying to bring up in her mind the face of Colleen Tichna. She couldn't quite do it. All she could visualize were the pictures on the desk in front of her. Maybe she was wrong. There must be a lot of strawberry blondes who look like this. But how many went missing fifty years ago? And were never seen again?

She wondered briefly if she should call Detective Cellini or Chief Wistrom, then decided to wait until she had talked to the girl's sister and showed her the pictures. No need to get the Eau Claire cops all excited if she was wrong. Then she wondered where Eau Claire was and looked it up in her Rand/McNally atlas. Northwest Wisconsin. Quite close to the twin cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul.

Margaret had married a Foster, Helen recalled. Gordon. She riffled through the slim phone book and quickly found Gordon and Margaret Foster. On Ninth Street. She thought that she knew the house. Centerville was still a very small town, not much bigger than it had been fifty years ago.

Helen wondered if she should call first. She looked at her watch. A few minutes after five. They were both probably retired, so even if they'd been out somewhere, they'd be home now.

She called a hurried good-bye to her staff and made her way downstairs to the parking lot and got in her unlocked Bug.

The Fosters lived in an older part of town where the houses were all different from each other. Most of the two-story homes had porches and one-car garages (though some were not deep enough to hold a modern van or station wagon). Helen saw a car in the open garage, so she pulled into the driveway and climbed

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the front steps. The screen door was closed, but the wooden door was open.

She pushed the doorbell and heard a chime in the distance. Through the screen she could see an elderly man shuffling toward her, pushing a wheeled walker ahead of him. He was a big man, she could tell, even as he hunched over the walker. He wore a blue chambray shirt and suspendered dark brown cotton pants. His face was craggy, quite pale, and adorned with a scraggly gray beard. Before he reached the door, however, an elderly lady came bustling up.

"Margaret?" Helen asked.

"Yes. Do I know you?"

"We haven't seen each other for years. I'm Helen Rush."

"Sure. The librarian. We're not readers, or we'd have seen each other oftener. Well, come in, come in. You know Gordon too, then?"

Margaret Foster's face was lightly lined, her hair almost pure white. She was tall and slim, and she moved with an easy stride that was almost a glide. Very graceful, Helen thought, especially for a woman over seventy. She wore bluejeans that stopped at mid calf and a man's white shirt with the tails hanging loosely.

"Yes, I know Gordon. How are you?"

"As you see, an old man. I worked in the coal mines all my life. Got anthracosis. That's black lung disease. Emphysema and . . ."

Margaret broke in. "Gordy, Helen doesn't want to hear all that!"

He grunted and said, "Why the hell did she ask me how I was, then?"

"Sit down, Helen, over here. And tell me what brings you here. I take it this is not a social call."

Helen settled in a chair before she pulled the two pictures out of her handbag. Without a word she handed them to Margaret.

Margaret gasped and said with a slight stutter, "C-C-Colleen!" She handed the pictures to Gordon, who had remained standing, and said to Helen, "Wherever did you get these?"

Gordon's hands trembled noticeably. His face paled, then flushed a few seconds later. Margaret jumped to her feet and crossed the room, but he waved her away. "I'm okay. Bit of a shock, though, ain't it? Where did you get these, Helen?"

She told them.

"Why in the world would she go to Eau Claire?" Margaret asked.

"Maybe she was taken there. Before or after she was killed. By someone from Eau Claire or who at least knew the area," Helen said. She paused, looked at Margaret for a long moment, then said quietly, "Are you absolutely sure that it is Colleen?"

Margaret stood up, said, "Just a moment," and left the room. A few minutes later she returned with a Centerville High School

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yearbook, dated 1953. She turned quickly to the seniors, put her finger on a face, and said, "Here."

There was little doubt that the picture of the modeled head and the picture of Colleen were of the same person.

"For years we left her room exactly how she'd left it. Except for dusting and vacuuming once in a while. But finally we gave up hope of ever seeing her again. Me and Mom and Dad went through her things, sold or gave away most of the stuff. But I just couldn't part with the yearbook. We had other pictures of her, of course, but that was one of the best."

"You weren't married yet? When she disappeared?"

"Engaged." She glanced at Gordon's profile. He'd taken a chair from the dining room table, turned it halfway, and sat down so that he faced away from the two ladies. He nodded and said, "Yeah. And we didn't get married for almost another year. We were both too shook up about Colleen's disappearance."

Helen stood up and put the pictures back in her bag. "I'd better get in touch with Eau Claire."

On her way home, she replayed the scene in the Fosters' home. They had seemed shocked, especially Gordon, but not overly emotional. Perhaps after fifty years a more subdued reaction might be expected. She remembered now that Gordon and Margaret had been high school sweethearts, but had broken up when Margaret went to the college in Carbondale for two years and Gordon left town for work elsewhere. She couldn't remember where, but she thought it was with a logging company because he used to say he'd found one job he didn't want to do the rest of his life and that was cutting down trees.

When he came back to Centerville, he'd gone directly into the coal mine. He and Margaret got together again when she came home from school. Helen couldn't remember why Margaret hadn't finished college. Money problems perhaps? Poor grades? Or just lack of motivation to continue? It certainly didn't matter now.

At home Helen called the station house in Eau Claire. The chief had gone home already, but Cellini was still there. She went right to the point. "This is Helen Rush. I'm calling from Centerville, a little town in southern Illinois that you never heard of. I think I've identified your Jane Doe." She sketched for him just why she thought she knew.

"This is great news, Mrs. Rush. But we've got to be completely certain. Are there any living blood relatives?"

"A sister."

"Will she cooperate with a DNA test?"

"Oh yes, I think so. How will you do that?"

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"It's become very simple. We've always used hair samples and forensic pathologists. But now there are labs all over the country that use the cheek swab technique. Mainly it's used in paternity cases because it can be done in the privacy of the home. In this case where a murder has—"

"There's no doubt that this was murder?"

"None. We haven't released the details officially, although the press certainly learned most of them back fifty years ago. As I was saying, we'll have to ask Mrs. Foster to go into the local police station because we need official witnesses that the test was actually done on her."

"Will you be coming down? To reopen the case?"

"I might have to. Since the body was found in Eau Claire County, we have jurisdiction in the case. But perhaps your police force could handle the details and save me the trip. We'd have no problem with sending them all the information we've got here."

Helen's voice had a smile in it. "We have a two-man police force. No detectives."

"What's your closest big town?"

"Cairo." She pronounced it "Care-oh." "But that's a hundred miles away."

"They probably should be notified anyway. The sister should do it. Her husband's living?"

"Yes. Gordon."

"He could handle it if Margaret doesn't want to."

"She'd be better able. He's pretty well crippled up with black lung disease from the coal mines."

Cellini recalled that among all the junk found near Colleen there had been a headlamp. Apparently no one had thought anything of it because deer hunters sometimes used them to get to their stands in the dark and farmers sometimes used them to get to their barns before sunup.

"Well, Mrs. Rush, there are a few things I can check on here. Oh, by the way, did Gordon Foster ever work in Eau Claire or near here?"

"Not that I know of. Well, he did work for a logging company somewhere just after he graduated from high school." She paused several seconds. "Detective Cellini! What are you suggesting?"

"I'm not suggesting a thing. Just asking questions."

"Well, you're on the wrong track there!"

"Probably. Well, you know what to do now. Margaret's to get the cheek swab kit from your police station if they have it, or order it from the Internet. She's to notify the police in Cairo to see if they want to work on the case now that the girl has been identified. Under our supervision, of course. Remember, we have jurisdiction

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here. Oh, yes, and we'll have to know if Margaret wants Colleen's remains reburied here or shipped down there."

"I'll have her call you."

Cellini put one of the junior detectives, Neil Nelson, on a search for employees of logging companies fifty years ago. There were several ways to do this, but only two that had any chance of success at this late date. The first was to check with each of the companies that had been in business fifty years ago to see if they had payroll records from that era. The second was to check the income tax records. Withholding taxes had been established by Congress in the mid forties so those records could be subpoenaed. Or the records might still be extant in the Madison offices of Wisconsin's Department of Revenue.

Cellini went back to the list of junk found at the scene to be sure they hadn't missed something else thought unimportant at the time. Nothing clicked in his mind that would link a miner or an Illinois resident. What did he expect? A 1955 Illinois license plate that could be traced to Gordon Foster?

The Cairo police wanted no part in the case. Their chief said, in effect, that the trail was too cold for them to spend the money and officers' time on something that was doomed to failure from the start. But they had no problem about turning over what information they had on record about the investigation into Colleen's disappearance. There wasn't much. Just a little about the search and the interrogation of a few people, including the short-tempered boyfriend. And they would do the DNA test if Mrs. Foster could come to the station house.

Margaret Foster did get a cheek swab done at the Cairo police station. The report was sent to Cellini by fax. There was a ninety-nine percent chance that the murdered girl was a blood relative of Margaret Tichna Foster.

"That's as good as it gets," Cellini told Chief Wistrom, "you can sometimes get a hundred percent on an exclusion, but almost never on an inclusion. That girl is Colleen Tichna."

"Agreed," the chief said.

It took a week for Neil Nelson to find in the yellowed records of the Mosinee paper mill the name "Gordon Foster." From Centerville, Illinois. Age eighteen when he was hired. Worked for them for two years, first as a chain sawyer, then as a driver of a big flatbed stake truck that carries loads of pulpwood—popple and pine—from woods to mill.

"Not likely to be a coincidence," Cellini mused to Nelson.

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"No, sir."

Cellini spun in his chair and pulled out a plat map of Eau Claire county. He opened it to the index page, found the proper page number for the area where the body was found, put his finger on that area, and looked up at Nelson. "Mosinee owns that forest. Almost a full section. Mosinee also owns the paper company."

"Foster could have worked in those very woods."

"Yes. I've got to go down there."

"He'll never confess, and there's nothing but very circumstantial evidence to tie him to the murder."

"Yes, just the headlamp and the fact that he must have known the woods around here pretty good."

"Not enough."

"You're right. That's why I've got to go down there."

"Yes, sir."

He called Helen Rush and told her he was coming down there the next day. He could hear her take in a deep cogwheel breath and let it out in a rush. "So," she said softly, "you've hit upon something, then?"

"Yes. I'll tell you all about it tomorrow. Will you reserve me a room if there's a motel there?"

"Yes. We have one small motel. The Red Roof."

Cellini left the next day. It was an easy flight: an hour and a half from Minneapolis to Chicago, a little over an hour from Chicago to Cairo. He rented a car at the airport and drove directly to the Red Roof Motel on the edge of Centerville and checked in. It was three o'clock when he arrived at the library.

Helen was waiting for him at the front desk and led him back to her private office. She closed the door, sat in her swivel chair, and said, "Please tell me what's going on."

"Gordon Foster worked for the Mosinee paper mill for two years. Fifty-two years ago. He worked in the woods felling trees at first, then he drove a logging truck. I think he killed Colleen Tichna, drove to Eau Claire, and dumped her body at the end of that logging road. He knew very well that it wasn't used much anymore because he himself had helped to clear cut it a few years before."

Helen sat with fingers pressed against her pursed lips as she listened to Cellini. Then she said, "I do hope you're wrong."

"Well, let's go see what we can find out. They're expecting us?"

"Yes. I told them it would be around three. It's quarter after now."

Cellini drove them to the Ninth Street address in his rental car. The Fosters awaited them on the front porch but invited them in, "because," Margaret said, "we got nosy neighbors."

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Margaret handed Cellini the yearbook with Colleen's picture. He glanced at it and said, "Thanks, Mrs. Foster. But we don't need it. Her DNA matches yours."

Tears sprung to her eyes. "So the waiting is over," she said softly, and wiped her eyes with a small handkerchief.

"Yes, ma'am. It's what we call closure. Now we just have to find out who did it."

"Any leads, detective?"

"I've got a few ideas. There was a boyfriend who used to beat her up when he got drunk."

"Oh yes, Bert something or other. Franks, I think. You can't question him. He died in Vietnam. And as I recall, he was completely cleared because of an alibi."

Cellini sat quietly for a moment. The grandfather clock in the corner ticked loudly in the silence.

"Mr. Foster?"

Gordon Foster's eyes widened, then contracted.

"Mr. Foster. I understand that you worked in Eau Claire for a couple of years."

"Yes." The tone of his voice was querulous, as if to say, "What's that got to do with anything?"

"What kind of work did you do?"

"You probably know the answer. For the paper mill. Logging at first, then driving a log truck."

"Have you been back there since you left?"

"Of course not. No reason to."

"How well did you know Colleen Tichna?"

"Not too well. I was engaged to Margaret, and Colleen had her boyfriend. And we were a couple of years apart in school. At that age you don't see or do much with someone older or younger. Just what are you getting at, detective?"

"Just routine questions, sir. I'll be talking to quite a few people in the next few days."

Cellini pondered for a moment. "Did you work in the Mosinee Forest down by the Chippewa River?"

"Yeah. For about six months. We clear cut the entire section. Furnished almost all the pulp the mill needed during that time."

"Could you find that place again? Today?"

"I doubt it."

"But you could have, just a couple of years after you left?"

"Probably."

"I think you did. I think that's where you dumped Colleen's body."

Gordon's face blanched white and his lower lip trembled. Margaret gasped, crossed the room, and placed a hand on his

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shoulder. He said in a raspy voice, "That's a damn lie, Detective." Margaret soothed him by speaking softly to him.

Cellini waited patiently for a few moments, then said, "You worked in the coal mines near here?"

"Forty years," he managed to say through tight jaws and lips.

"Did you know that a miner's headlamp was found at the scene?"

"No, how the hell would I know that?"

Margaret sucked in her breath and put her fingers to her mouth. She's remembered something, Cellini thought. And Gordon was telling the truth—the headlamp was one of items on the "junk list" and was not released to the public, not because it was important but because it had been thought to be irrelevant.

"Just asking. You know, Mr. Foster, that Colleen was three months pregnant at the time of the murder?"

"Yes, everyone knows that now."

"How does everyone know that here?"

"It was in the news. The reporter wanting to open up the case again. The exhumation. All that. It was in the Carbondale paper, which everyone here takes if they take a paper at all."

"It couldn't have been. The fact that she was pregnant was never released to the press."

"It must have been. How else would I have known?"

"That's what you'll have to explain to the judge and jury, Mr. Foster. I'm arresting you for the murder of Colleen Tichna. Anything you say from now on . . ."

The story came out in tearful, stuttering sentences with long pauses as Gordon fought for control of his breathing. As he'd said earlier, he was engaged to Margaret and Colleen had her boyfriend. But he still had somewhat of a roving eye. After all, he was only twenty-one and not really quite ready to settle down.

One evening after work he decided to drive down to the lake a few miles from town and do some fishing. He settled in on one of his favorite inlets in a rather remote part of the lake. That was back when there was a lot of undeveloped shoreline. His tight line was in the water and his back against a tree trunk. He was half asleep when he heard a voice saying, "Well, fancy meeting you here!" It was Colleen. She was biking, had been to visit her grandmother, who had a cabin on the lake, and saw his car parked on the road by the path to his fishing spot. One thing led to another and he was unfaithful to his fiancée. That was the only time. They both agreed that they would not meet again. At least not like that.

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Three months later Colleen informed him that she was pregnant. And it had to be his baby because she and her boyfriend always took precautions. She insisted that he marry her. He refused and she went off crying. But she kept coming back to him whenever she could find him alone. Finally, one night when he'd been drinking heavily, she showed up at his house. He lost his temper and in a drunken rage beat her head in and broke her arm. He thought she was faking unconsciousness, but finally he realized that she was unconscious.

He panicked then. He hadn't meant to hurt her that bad. Maybe the doctors could . . . no, if she died he'd be arrested for murder.

He put her in the trunk of his car and took off. At first he had no idea where he was going, but gradually, as his liquor wore off, he got the idea to drive all night to Eau Claire, dump her at the end of a tote road that he knew, and drive right back.

And that's what he did. The first time he stopped for gas he phoned the mine office and left a message that he wouldn't be in to work the next day.

It took him ten hours each way. When he got home the next day he found he hadn't been missed by anyone. But the town was in an uproar because Colleen Tichna had disappeared. He helped with the search.

The only thing that worried him was that he'd lost his headlamp when he bent over to drag the body into the "junk yard." Unfortunately, it had landed on the switch and turned itself off. He'd searched briefly, even turned the car around so the lights would shine on the junk, but he was in such a hurry to get away that he gave it up very quickly.

That's what had brought Margaret's fingers to her mouth. She had remembered that he'd had to buy a new headlamp shortly after Colleen disappeared. But of course she hadn't made the connection then.

She sat quietly sobbing, watching Gordon as he told his story. Then she asked Cellini, "What's going to happen now?"

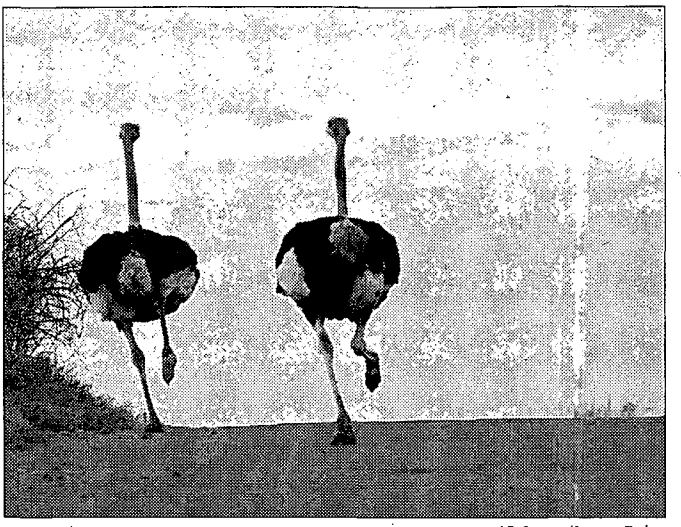
"That's up to the judge. He'll take into account his age, his lung condition, his record since that time, the fact that it wasn't premeditated, and any other factors that his lawyer can enter."

She nodded and reached for Gordon's hand. "I'll be with you all the way."

The "too cold a trail" had turned hot after all.

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Mysterious Photograph



AP Images/Jerome Delay

To the Victor Belongs . . .

We will give a prize of $25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less, and be sure to include a crime) based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to AHMM, Dell Magazines, 475 Park Avenue South, New York, New York 10016. Please label your entry "October Contest," and be sure your name and address are written on the story you submit. If possible, please also include your Social Security number.

The winning entry for the April Mysterious Photograph contest will be found on page 141.

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EITHER WAY

BRUCE GRAHAM

"State against Robert Kluge," cackled the bailiff. "Hearing before the court."

Sharon Lucelli sprang to her feet. "That's us. If the judge lets Kluge out of custody and doesn't let us have his DNA, the case is sunk." She gathered her purse and strode toward the twin doors where the bailiff waited.

John Williams trailed along. He was a slender six footer in an ill-fitting suit and a tan raincoat. Next to the courtroom door he carefully pushed a wad of gum from his mouth, wrapped it in a piece of paper from his jacket pocket, and dropped the tiny bundle in the trash receptacle.

"Come *on*," Sharon said.

John followed her past the bailiff and into the courtroom, scattered with people. Edwin Rooker, the county prosecutor, was in an apparently pleasant conversation with Ann Pine, the defendant's attorney, in front of the empty jury box.

"State against Robert Kluge," called out the assistant court clerk from beside the witness box. "Please, everybody, take your places."

Sharon and John walked quickly to the front row of seats reserved for witnesses and sat down. They were prepared for this, the first—and probably pivotal—act in this long-running drama.

Nineteen months earlier Mary Olson had been finishing her junior year at Northwest Community College. She was a slightly overweight late bloomer, a stolid navy veteran with shore patrol experience, who worked part-time as a bartender at the downtown hangout known as Louie Louie's. Her job included maintaining order among the sometimes unruly patrons.

On April 19, she left Louie Louie's at her usual time, three A.M., and was not seen or heard from again at the college or the bar. She missed two days of classes and two nights of scheduled work. This was unusual, since no one interviewed about her could recall her ever having missed even one event without giving some sort of

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notice. On the morning of April 22, her fully clothed body was discovered thrown over a bank along Highway 20, west of town. Her purse, apparently complete with contents, including an empty wallet, was discovered a half mile farther west in a ditch.

The autopsy report showed no indication of sexual assault. She had been badly beaten with some sort of metal object that left traces of paint in her hair. The cause of death was listed as asphyxiation, meaning that she was strangled. Of special interest to the investigators was tissue, hair, blood, and fibers under several of her fingernails and in her mouth, evidence that she had fought vigorously against her attacker. This was not mentioned in news releases. By means he kept to himself, the medical examiner fixed the time of death as the morning of April 19.

Mary was not known to have had any boyfriends, although she had dated several of her classmates at the community college, the latest one at least two months before her death. Two of these had graduated and were far away at the time. Two others were eliminated as "persons of interest" by solid alibis. The one remaining allowed investigators free rein of his home where nothing even remotely incriminating was found and provided a DNA sample that quickly excluded him from consideration.

In the meantime, investigators tracked down most of the dozens of patrons of Louie Louie's and several people known to have been in the neighborhood around the time of Mary Olson's departure. But through crosschecking of their stories most of them could be excluded from a possible suspect pool. The special "Serial Killer Squad," set up by the state in an effort to cut off the sort of demented killer whose work seemed to fit this homicide, worked down the remaining potential suspects to only three.

"Your Honor," the prosecutor said, "for the purpose of simplicity, the State concedes that Mr. Kluge is in custody, and for the purpose of taking a DNA sample, pursuant to Judge Nguyen's search warrant of September 26, last. The State further concedes that because of Mr. Kluge's physical resistance to giving the sample, it is the State's intention to forcibly extract samples of his blood, hair, and saliva for the purpose of testing. The State further agrees that all of Mr. Kluge's attorney's steps to bring this matter before the court are procedurally sound."

Sharon Lucelli knew that they were not only procedurally sound, but also amazingly prompt. Robert Kluge had been in custody pursuant to the search warrant for only two hours and had made only a brief telephone call to his attorney, Ann Pine, when she pranced into the sheriff's office with a restraining order preventing the taking of

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the specimens pending a hearing on question of whether Robert Kluge could be compelled to provide a DNA specimen.

The judge was a somber, fortyish new appointee from three counties away. He was unknown to Sharon, and she momentarily felt the usual resentment for the judiciary's interference in the grinding and grueling police work that led to convictions.

"Unless the State justifies its search warrant," said the judge, "I'll order him released because he cannot be compelled to provide a DNA sample."

"The State has evidence that would justify taking Mr. Kluge's DNA. For ease of understanding and a clear record, we intend to call Officer Lucelli, then Officer Williams, and the people connected with the DNA examination, then back to Officer Lucelli."

The judge nodded. He wasn't about to provoke an argument; it was up to the prosecutor to present his case as he saw fit.

Sharon well knew that if the State's case failed, Robert Kluge would walk out, and another warrant to compel him to provide a specimen would also be denied. If that were to happen, she was resigned to the case being lost, even though she believed that the case against him could be made. Her mouth became dry. She sidled to the gate through the bar into the lawyers' section of the courtroom, knowing that the prosecutor could see her out of the corner of his eye.

"I call Detective Lucelli," Rooker announced.

Sharon advanced past the prosecutor to the witness box. She almost took the chair before she noticed the assistant clerk holding a weathered, drooping book. She uttered a firm "I do" in response to the words of the oath. For an instant she wondered if she would ever say the same words in a much different setting with her beau Tom Bernhardt.

Sharon had met Tom Bernhardt not long after the Mary Olson story broke, but long before she was assigned to the case. He was an assistant manager of Shaw's grocery, where Sharon had been called to interview witnesses to a gang shootout in the parking lot. Tom's adroit handling of his employees as he gathered them into his office and coached them just enough to develop the story simply yet clearly impressed Sharon. His gentle flirting left Sharon with no doubt that he would follow up in some way. His subsequent call to the office with questions on how the investigation was going led to an invitation to join him for lunch. The rest, as the saying goes, was history.

On their second date, Tom explained that, in spite of his name, he was Italian. His ancestors were from the Tyrol region in

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extreme northern Italy, but his name came from a great-great grandfather who had been allowed into the family against the better judgment of the clan. Several months later, Sharon was sure a marriage proposal was right around the corner, then matters stalled after she was put on the follow-up team for the Mary Olson case.

Sharon was brought into the investigation after the Serial Killer Squad had finished their labors. She was part of the "Olson Crime Team" led by Lucas Riggins and included John Williams, Peter Melendez, and Ian Maloney. The departing Serial Killer Squad reported that, following seven weeks of intense study, it was their opinion that the Olson homicide was an isolated act perpetrated by someone with no inclinations other than related to the victim.

Up until that time, the dead woman had been only a name to Sharon. That changed when Sharon reviewed the file, saw the photographs and read the woman's biography. Sharon then dedicated herself to locating and putting away whoever was responsible for the murder.

The sheriff instructed the Olson Crime Team to focus on what other leads could be developed. By mid summer, Sharon and John Williams were concentrating on the three people who stood out as likely suspects.

Robert Kluge had been a part-time student for several years. He was single and was self employed as a computer consultant and Web site developer for individuals and small businesses. His profile indicated that he was serious and fancied himself to be of very high intelligence, but he had a short temper. He had relocated to the area from the West Coast and was known at many local restaurants, bars, and bookstore cafes. His statements in the file were terse and, as far as Mary Olson was concerned, stated simply that he had met her several times at Louie Louie's. He had asked her out twice and had been refused. He admitted to having had three casual affairs since arriving in the area and to be paying support on a child in Bakersfield, California.

Another student was Roland Derringer, a gangly twenty-two year old who had been in three of Mary Olson's classes. Other students told the investigators that the suspected Derringer was fixated on her. He lived with his parents on the west side of town, and as far as could be determined, he had been to Louie Louie's only once, and that was early in the morning of Mary Olson's disappearance. He worked as a clerk at a convenience store a few blocks from the community college; his shift normally ended when the store closed at one A.M. He denied ever having asked Mary Olson out—he

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knew that she would turn him down—but he did say that he "liked her looks." He had no known recent involvements with women, but admitted to what the Serial Killer Squad already knew, that he habitually viewed pornography and violent videos.

George Katsoris was a tall, burly part-time bouncer at Paradise, a "gentlemen's club" downtown, and also worked on call for several trucking companies when they needed muscular help. He stopped at Louie Louie's two or three nights a week when his shift ended at two A.M. Within two weeks before Mary Olson's disappearance, he had invited her to join him at Paradise, but she had rebuffed him, and he responded by commenting that "You may be sorry you didn't."

None of the three had alibis for the early morning hours of Mary Olson's murder. All three were seen in town later that morning. Tire tracks found along the shoulder of the highway near the body were "consistent"—in the classic prosecutorial phrase—with the make of the tires on Katsoris's pickup, a not very helpful conclusion, since a spot check around the courthouse square disclosed that probably a quarter of the vehicles in the county had the same sort of tires.

By the middle of August everyone on the Olson team felt they'd hit a dead end, unless one of the three suspects could be isolated as the more likely target, or something out of the blue redirected their efforts. Edwin Rooker agreed with the team's belief that there was insufficient reason to charge any of the men, but enough to justify focusing on them. "But," he said, "we will need some real probable cause to go for anybody's DNA."

At a late afternoon Friday meeting, when the discussion about the case was winding down, Sharon asked: "Why don't we try a lie detector?"

The others stared at her.

"It's not subtle, but it might lead us somewhere."

Lucas Riggins shook his head. "No. We'd have to let them know the results. And it'd spook the liar too soon. We don't want any of them to become defensive."

Sharon felt foolish. She wondered if she belonged on the team.

"We could try the DNA dragnet, though," Lucas said. "We ask the three of them to give specimens for testing. If anyone shows up positive, we have him. If one of the three refuses, we know who to focus on."

"He'd still be alerted," said Sharon.

"We'll let them think that we're at a dead end and are testing dozens, maybe a couple of hundred people. Tell them the state is picking up the tab, and we're trying to eliminate unnecessary work."

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Form consents for DNA testing were prepared. They contained a date and time that could be selected for giving the specimen and were numbered 65, 111, and 132 to give the impression that large numbers of people were being screened. Another set of sheets contained a list of names with numbers, dates, and times to look like a number of tests had already been scheduled.

Sharon and Lucas were sent out to visit the three targets. The first target, George Katsoris, was reluctant and wanted to be sure that the test would be used only for the Mary Olson investigation and not for any other purpose. Sharon added that language to the form, which he signed.

"He's done a couple of things that might get him jail time," Lucas said as they climbed into the police cruiser, "otherwise he wouldn't have limited the scope of the test."

"But he signed."

Lucas Riggins cranked the cruiser to life. "Of course. He wants us to go away. I'll run the guy's history."

They arrived at Robert Kluge's townhouse condominium in mid afternoon on a Saturday. He greeted them in sweat clothes. "I'm setting up my new home entertainment center," he said as he led them into his living room. Amid the disarray, he asked them what they wanted without inviting them to have a seat.

Sharon explained their visit and held out to him the consent form. She made it a point to allow him to see the list of fictitious others.

Kluge made no effort to take the form.

"Will you do this to help us?" she asked.

Kluge's arms hung at this side. "No."

"It will help to ease our work," Lucas added.

"No."

Sharon was not prepared for such a blunt reply. "Would you mind telling us why not?"

"No." Kluge moved slightly toward them, obviously trying to shut them out.

Lucas tried again. "We're very busy. This will help us to narrow our list of possible subjects of interest."

"I'm very busy, too, as you can see," said Kluge. He stretched out his arm toward the front door. "Have a nice day."

Sharon put the papers together and told the truth. "You're the first one to turn us down."

"I'll show you out," he said.



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Sharon and Lucas were silent as they drove to see the third person on their list, but she knew that Lucas shared her thoughts: They knew their killer. Now how do they prove it? When Roland Derringer easily agreed to provide a specimen, Sharon was even more certain who their prime suspect was.

When the tests of the other two men came back negative, the members of the team all agreed that their primary job was to find the chink in Kluge's armor. Sharon expressed dismay that their prime suspect had been so adamant without giving an excuse. "He could have said he was allergic to needles, feared contracting AIDS from the needle, or disliked doctors or the police. But to simply say no just runs the risk of us thinking he's a suspect."

Lucas pursed his lips. "He probably figures he's a suspect and doesn't see to cooperate with us," he said. "Criminals break into two types. To some of them it's very important to avoid being suspected, like the wife who wants the insurance. If serious suspicion falls on them it defeats the purpose of doing the crime. So they make a positive effort to deflect suspicion in another direction by being cooperative and giving statements. The other type simply wants to keep from being caught; they don't care if they're suspected. They want to avoid giving themselves away, so for them, it's more dangerous to talk. Kluge is the second type, and he seems very intelligent. 'Catch me if you can,' he says, 'but I won't play games with you or say anything or do anything that might trap me.' Most people aren't crafty enough to understand the difference, so they talk and give us clues. Kluge is one of the very few who might be able to get away with telling us to stuff it."

Sharon tried to explain the difference between the two types to Tom that night over dinner at her place, but he was less than understanding. He complained about what he called her "obsession" with the Olson case.

"Can't you just be a regular cop?" he asked.

"I am a 'regular cop,' Tom. I spend time on routine work, then I work on Olson."

"How long will this go on?"

She thought for a moment. "I can't say."

"You need to give me some idea. We have plans to make, I hope."

"We do. But not now."

At the next team meeting, Lucas Riggins suggested another approach to the DNA challenge.

The normal method of securing a DNA sample was to gather

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saliva from the inside of the subject's mouth with a swab that would be sent for analysis and comparison with the sample from the crime scene or victim. If a suspect was in custody and charged with the crime, or if a warrant for the procedure had been obtained, this technique was allowed as "nontestimonial evidence." This had passed constitutional muster, since it did not involve statements by the accused. In the Kluge case there was insufficient evidence to justify his arrest or even a search warrant, and since he was not going to say "ah" for such a procedure, the specimen would need to be obtained some other way.

One method is to go through the suspect's trash to find an item with a bit of saliva or blood or hair. This has rarely been successful and is impractical where trash is comingled. A more common procedure is to find something discarded that is indisputably the suspect's. Under the legal concept that a person has no expectation of the sanctity of abandoned property, this has met with universal court approval. Once a suspect's DNA from a discarded item is linked to the suspect, a search warrant is easily obtained for more precise testing.

The team's task was to find something that Robert Kluge had discarded and to verify that it was his, a cigarette or cigar, a napkin, chewing gum, a plug of chewing tobacco, or even a toothpick. But officers who had shadowed him confirmed that he used none of those things.

Another relatively simple find is a discarded drink container. Kluge was in the habit of buying coffee at a Starbucks near campus, where the officers had observed him crumpling up and dropping his paper coffee cups in the trash bin, if he wasn't carrying his coffee with him to his car. He would lurk near the trash bin until other customers tossed in their cups before he tossed in his and sauntered away. A chain of custody showing the cup as a source for later DNA testing could not be established with certainty. And the team was unwilling to show their hand by pushing Kluge aside to grab the empty coffee cup as it fell into the trash.

Sharon brightened. "We could have the coffee shop employees take the trash away as soon as he throws the cup in."

They were all silent for a few moments. Then Maloney, a grizzled veteran deputy, shook his head. "No. The stuff would get mixed up, and by the time we could get to it we wouldn't be able to verify which cup was his."

"We could approach him to ask some questions," Sharon said, "but it would be better that he didn't know we were after him."

Maloney put his hands flat on the table. "We need to chance it. One of us will watch him, while two others wait around the corner.

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When he starts for the trash, the one watching calls the others on a cell phone, and they will then swoop down on him right after he tosses the cup in and head him to a corner where they can talk.

"We'll pick a time when the place is crowded; he won't want a confrontation in front of people," Maloney continued, drawing out his words, as if he were thinking out loud. "He seems to have a big ego. He thinks he can outfox us without anybody else knowing it. If we just sidle up to him and make it look casual, he'll bite."

"What if we created a distraction?" Lucas Riggins asked the group.

The youngest member of the team, Melendez frowned. "Like what?"

Lucas shrugged. "A fight? A pretty blonde?"

Sharon glanced around the room. "Tom and I will have an argument."

They all stared at her.

Maloney shook his head. "He knows you already. John, can you and the missus fake an argument?"

Williams snickered. "Fake one? We'll have a real one."

Sharon held out her hands, palms up. "You'll be having coffee, and when he drops the cup you'll jump up, shouting at each other and moving toward the trash can. As he moves away, crowd him a little, but let him get away, then you two can get to the trash when he's moved on. You won't have to even confront him. He doesn't know you."

Amid the laughter, Lucas said, "You're it, then. Practice it a few times at home."

There was a titter of agreement around the room. Within a few minutes the procedure was settled, with the Williamses doing their routine on the first opportunity, while the others agreed on the days when they would take turns being ready to move in.

Sharon left the witness stand as John Williams approached. He answered "Yes" to the oath and sat down.

Rooker went through Williams's credentials and then asked, "Would you describe how you went about securing the sample identified as Sample A."

Williams looked at the judge. "On the morning of September sixth, Valerie—my wife—and I were at a table in the store where the defendant was sipping his coffee. We followed a script that we worked out a few days earlier, talking seriously, with some disagreements thrown in. The defendant finished his coffee and stood up. Valerie and I began to talk louder. The defendant walked away from us, and I saw him throw the cup into the trash con-

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tainer. I jumped up and began to argue with Valerie. She argued back. I grabbed my coffee container and plastic plate and napkin and walked quickly toward the trash container, talking loudly over my shoulder. She followed with our things, talking back to me. As we approached the trash container, the defendant backed away and we were able to crowd around the trash container, still arguing with each other. The defendant edged back toward the door of the coffee shop, and as he turned away and went out the door, Detectives Melendez and Maloney came in and blocked the defendant's view of Valerie and me. I reached into the trash container and found the defendant's coffee cup."

Kluge's lawyer was on her feet. "Objection, Your Honor. A conclusion."

"I agree with the defendant's lawyer, Your Honor," the prosecutor said. "I'll clarify. You picked a cup out of the trash, but what made you think it was the defendant's container?"

"It was crushed. I saw him crush his cup on the way to the trash. It was the only one crushed. The other cups on top were Valerie's and mine. We marked them with our initials."

"Were there other cups underneath?"

"There was more material underneath, but none of them were crushed."

"What did you do?"

"I gathered all of the cups, mine, Valerie's, and the def—the crushed one, and put each one in a separate plastic evidence baggie. I labeled each baggie with my name and took them immediately to the sheriff's office in my custody."

"What did Detectives Maloney and Melendez do?"

"They photographed the inside of the trash container and the store, and we left."

There ensued nearly an hour of the usual droning identification of exhibits, explanation of photographs, and verification of what lawyers call the "chain of custody," the unbroken series of links between an event and a subsequent event, that verified that the crushed cup retrieved from the trash container originated with the defendant. Then Edwin Rooker told the judge, "I will recall Officer Lucelli."

Ann Pine was on her feet. "Nobody from the laboratory?"

"For reasons that will be apparent, not now."

Kluge's attorney returned to her seat with a shrug.

Sharon returned to the witness stand.

"Officer Lucelli," began Rooker, "did you see the results of the DNA testing on the substance on the crushed cup?"

"Yes," said Sharon calmly.

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. "And was there a match between that substance DNA and the DNA found with the victim, Mary Olson?"

"Objection," cried Ann Pine. "Foundation?"

"I'll link it up, Your Honor."

The judge sighed. "Subject to linking up, I'll take it."

Sharon looked at the defendant.

Robert Kluge's lawyer sank down and was calm, chin on her left hand, elbow braced on the table.

Sharon shook her head. "There was no match."

Sharon had been crying when she called Tom Bernhardt with the news of the DNA results. An hour later she met him at the northside eatery Buca di Beppo, where they began with wine and continued with eggplant Parmigiana and chicken Marsala. All Sharon could talk about was how the test results had to be wrong.

"You're questioning a procedure that convicts a lot of people."

"It had to be his DNA on that cup. All of our work, our concentration on him." Sharon pawed around in her purse and drew out an envelope and spilled the contents between them. "These are photos of the cups. See how his cup is flattened. *He* did that."

Tom ignored the pictures. "Am I the only one who wants this charade to stop? You and I need to get on with our lives—together, I hope."

"I want that too, Tom. I need a little more time on this before we give up. He's playing with us. I almost think that he deliberately set it up to get rid of us."

"So he didn't murder Mary Olson and is making you go to a lot of work for nothing, luring you on?"

"What do you think, Tom?"

Tom said nothing for several seconds. "I won't give you an ultimatum. But can you give me a time limit?"

Sharon fumbled with the photos. "A few weeks?"

Tom held out his hand and took the pictures from Sharon. He stared at the pictures. He squinted at the photograph of the crumpled cup. "What's this on the cup? On the bottom?"

She held up the print and moved it close to her nose. "Printing. Like a stencil. Syr0406. So?"

Tom shuffled the photographs around. "The dates on the bottoms of your cups are different." He pointed at two prints. "It's a place and a date. Someplace, April. I know from working at Shaw's that everything has an expiration date. Even bottled water."

Sharon studied the photographs. "GrB0806." She stared at Tom. She said nothing for several moments.

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Tom licked his lips.

"Will there be anything more?" the waiter asked at the side of the table.

Tom looked at the man. "Do you have any disposable cups or plates in your kitchen?"

The man seemed puzzled.

"Like this?" Tom held up the photographs of the coffee cups.

The man still looked quizzical. "I think so."

"Would you ask around and find out if they have markings like this on the bottom . . ." Tom pointed to the stenciled numbers. ". . . and what they mean?"

"Uh, all right, I suppose."

"And we'll have two cappuccinos."

Sharon remained silent until the cappuccinos came and the waiter assured Tom that the information he asked for would be with him in a few minutes.

Five minutes later the waiter brought the check. "That's the production run, the name of the city, and the month and year of production. It's so they can be traced if there's a problem."

"Thanks. You've been a big help." Sharon smiled. "I think."

Sharon's statement that the DNA from the cup did not match the DNA from the victim caused the judge to perk up. He glanced from Sharon to Edwin Rooker to Ann Pine. He seemed poised to speak, when Rooker asked: "What did you do next?"

"I reviewed the photographs of the materials, the cups, and discovered that the date and city of manufacture of the cup that the defendant left in the trash was different from the date and city of manufacture of the other cups used that day. I then consulted with the leader of the team."

Ann Pine glared at Sharon.

"What did you do then?"

"We prepared the documentation for the search warrant on the defendant and his home and to acquire his DNA."

"Did you participate in the execution of the search warrant?"

"I did."

"What did you find?"

Ann Pine was on her feet. "Your Honor, objection, most vigorously. Counsel is putting the cart before the horse. There's no foundation for showing the results of the search warrant."

The judge nodded. "I agree. What was the basis for the search warrant?"

Sharon suspected that the judge had not looked at much in the file, expecting the case to be developed in open court. Not that

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that was unusual. But most judges would find time during the routine questioning of a witness to at least scan the documents already in the record. It was likely that the judge had been thinking of his winter skiing vacation. She knew that Rooker would have to move carefully.

Rooker seemed unflustered. "Officer Lucelli, what did you do based upon what you knew up to that point?"

"Can I explain my thought processes?"

"Your Honor?" Rooker asked the judge.

"Please do," he said, "especially since Miss Pine has not objected."

"Well, I concluded that Mr. Kluge was trying to avoid our efforts to salvage his abandoned DNA by throwing away cups that belonged to other people. I believed that he would do this because he was aware that we were trying to obtain his specimen surreptitiously, and that one or two episodes of us finding a different DNA on cups would send us off on another scent and that he'd be clear. That was the basis for Judge Nguyen issuing the current warrant."

"Anything else?"

"No."

Edwin Rooker half turned toward Ann Pine. "That's our case. Your witness, Counselor."

Kluge's lawyer rose and placed her clenched fists on the table. "Your Honor, the State's case speaks for itself. No questions."

The judge looked from one to the other. "It's your turn, Miss Pine."

"No evidence, Your Honor."

Of course, Sharon thought, better to stay silent than to risk her client blowing the case.

Ann Pine stood up. "No more than speculation and suspicion on the prosecution's part, over perfectly normal behavior by the—Mr. Kluge. The writ should issue. Mr. Kluge should be released and the State prevented from extracting a specimen for DNA testing." She sat down and leaned back.

"Your Honor," Rooker countered, "when there's only one reason for a person's actions, it logically follows that that is why he did it. Since the only purpose of his actions is to throw the authorities off the scent, it is because of his knowledge of his guilt. The warrant was properly issued."

The judge stared down at his desk. He picked up his pen and began to write on the file's docket card.

Sharon fell into Tom's arms outside of her apartment house. "It's over."

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"Are you sure?"

"You brought it to a head. If you didn't notice the printing on the cups, we wouldn't have gone for the warrant. The case would still be active. Win or lose, this was the key point of the case. We all knew that the DNA would be critical. That's why he had his lawyer all ready to fight on short notice when we requested a specimen. We've—I've—done all I can do."

"Well, what did the judge say?"

"Upstairs. I'll tell you all about it upstairs. Now we can get along with other things. You and me, I mean."

"Sure," Tom said. "I'm glad of that." And arm in arm they climbed the stairs.

SOLUTION TO THE MYSTERIOUS CIPHER

She made a few bucks and tried not to think of who she was or what her future held. The booze helped.

—Martin Limón

From "A Crust of Rice," AHMM, Jan./Feb. 2005

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THE LODGER

"There he is at last, and I'm glad of it, Ellen. 'Tain't a night you would wish a dog to be out in."

Mr. Bunting's voice was full of unmistakable relief. He was close to the fire, sitting back in a deep leather armchair—a clean-shaven, dapper man, still in outward appearance what he had been so long and now no longer was—a self-respecting butler.

"You needn't feel so nervous about him; Mr. Sleuth can look out for himself, all right." Mrs. Bunting spoke in a dry, rather tart tone. She was less emotional, better balanced, than was her husband. On her the marks of past servitude were less apparent, but they were there all the same—especially in her neat black stuff dress and scrupulously clean, plain collar and cuffs. Mrs. Bunting, as a single woman, had been for long years what is known as a useful maid.

"I can't think why he wants to go out in such weather. He did it in last week's fog, too," Bunting went on complainingly.

"Well, it's none of your business—now, is it?"

"No, that's true enough. Still, 'twould be a very bad thing for us if anything happened to him. This lodger's the first bit of luck we've had for a very long time."

Mrs. Bunting made no answer to this remark. It was too obviously true to be worth answering. Also she was listening—following in imagination her lodger's quick, singularly quiet—"stealthy," she called it to herself—progress through the dark, fog-filled hall and up the staircase.

"It isn't safe for decent folk to be out in such weather—not unless they have something to do that won't wait till tomorrow." Bunting had at last turned round. He was now looking straight into his wife's narrow, colorless face; he was an obstinate man, and liked to prove himself right. "I read you out the accidents in *Lloyd's* yesterday—shocking, they were, and all brought about by the fog! And then, that 'orrid monster at his work again—"

"Monster?" repeated Mrs. Bunting absently. She was trying to

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hear the lodger's footsteps overhead; but her husband went on as if there had been no interruption.

"It wouldn't be very pleasant to run up against such a party as that in the fog, eh?"

"What stuff you do talk!" she said sharply, and then she got up suddenly. Her husband's remark had disturbed her. She hated to think of such things as the terrible series of murders that were just then horrifying and exciting the nether world of London. Though she enjoyed pathos and sentiment—Mrs. Bunting would listen with mild amusement to the details of a breach-of-promise action—she shrank from stories of either immorality or physical violence.

Mrs. Bunting got up from the straight-backed chair on which she had been sitting. It would soon be time for supper.

She moved about the sitting room, flecking off an imperceptible touch of dust here, straightening a piece of furniture there.

Bunting looked around once or twice. He would have liked to ask Ellen to leave off fidgeting, but he was mild and fond of peace, so he refrained. However, she soon gave over what irritated him of her own accord.

But even then Mrs. Bunting did not at once go down to the cold kitchen, where everything was in readiness for her simple cooking. Instead, she opened the door leading into the bedroom behind, and there, closing the door quietly, stepped back into the darkness and stood motionless, listening.

At first she heard nothing, but gradually there came the sound of someone moving about in the room just overhead; try as she might, however, it was impossible for her to guess what her lodger was doing. At last she heard him open the door leading out on the landing. That meant that he would spend the rest of the evening in the rather cheerless room above the drawing-room floor—oddly enough, he liked sitting there best, though the only warmth obtainable was from a gas stove fed by a shilling-in-the-slot arrangement.

It was indeed true that Mr. Sleuth had brought the Buntings luck, for at the time he had taken their rooms it had been touch and go with them.

After having each separately led the sheltered, impersonal, and, above all, the financially easy existence that is the compensation life offers to those men and women who deliberately take upon themselves the yoke of domestic service, these two, butler and useful maid, had suddenly, in middle age, determined to join their fortunes and savings.

Bunting was a widower; he had one pretty daughter, a girl of

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seventeen, who now lived, as had been the case ever since the death of her mother, with a prosperous aunt. His second wife had been reared in the Foundling Hospital, but she had gradually worked her way up into the higher ranks of the servant class and as useful maid she had saved quite a tidy sum of money.

Unluckily, misfortune had dogged Mr. and Mrs. Bunting from the very first. The seaside place where they had begun by taking a lodging house became the scene of an epidemic. Then had followed a business experiment which had proved disastrous. But before going back into service, either together or separately, they had made up their minds to make one last effort, and, with the little money that remained to them, they had taken over the lease of a small house in the Marylebone Road.

Bunting, whose appearance was very good, had retained a connection with old employers and their friends, so he occasionally got a good job as waiter. During this last month his jobs had perceptibly increased in number and in profit; Mrs. Bunting was not superstitious, but it seemed that in this matter, as in everything else, Mr. Sleuth, their new lodger, had brought them luck.

As she stood there, still listening intently in the darkness of the bedroom, she told herself, not for the first time, what Mr. Sleuth's departure would mean to her and Bunting. It would almost certainly mean ruin.

Luckily, the lodger seemed entirely pleased both with the rooms and with his landlady. There was really no reason why he should ever leave such nice lodgings. Mrs. Bunting shook off her vague sense of apprehension and unease. She turned round, took a step forward, and, feeling for the handle of the door giving into the passage, she opened it, and went down with light, firm steps into the kitchen.

She lit the gas and put a frying pan on the stove, and then once more her mind reverted, as if in spite of herself, to her lodger, and there came back to Mrs. Bunting, very vividly, the memory of all that had happened the day Mr. Sleuth had taken her rooms.

The date of this excellent lodger's coming had been the twenty-ninth of December, and the time late afternoon. She and Bunting had been sitting, gloomily enough, over their small banked-up fire. They had dined in the middle of the day—he on a couple of sausages, she on a little cold ham. They were utterly out of heart, each trying to pluck up courage to tell the other that it was no use trying anymore. The two had also had a little tiff on that dreary afternoon. A newspaper seller had come yelling down the Marylebone Road, shouting out, "'Orrible murder in Whitechapel!" and just because Bunting had an old uncle living in

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the East End he had gone and bought a paper, and at a time, too, when every penny, nay, every halfpenny, had its full value! Mrs. Bunting remembered the circumstances because that murder in Whitechapel had been the first of these terrible crimes—there had been four since—which she would never allow Bunting to discuss in her presence, and yet which had of late begun to interest curiously, uncomfortably, even her refined mind.

But, to return to the lodger. It was then, on that dreary afternoon, that suddenly there had come to the front door a tremulous, uncertain double knock.

Bunting ought to have got up, but he had gone on reading the paper and so Mrs. Bunting, with the woman's greater courage, had gone out into the passage, turned up the gas, and opened the door to see who it could be. She remembered, as if it were yesterday instead of nigh on a month ago, Mr. Sleuth's peculiar appearance. Tall, dark, lanky, an old-fashioned top hat concealing his high bald forehead, he had stood there, an odd figure of a man, blinking at her.

"I believe—is it not a fact that you let lodgings?" he had asked in a hesitating, whistling voice, a voice that she had known in a moment to be that of an educated man—of a gentleman. As he had stepped into the hall, she had noticed that in his right hand he held a narrow bag—a quite new bag of strong brown leather.

Everything had been settled in less than a quarter of an hour. Mr. Sleuth had at once "taken" to the drawing-room floor, and then, as Mrs. Bunting eagerly lit the gas in the front room above, he had looked around him and said, rubbing his hands with a nervous movement, "Capital—capital! This is just what I've been looking for!"

The sink had specially pleased him—the sink and the gas stove. "This is quite first-rate!" he had exclaimed, "for I make all sorts of experiments. I am, you must understand, Mrs.—er—Bunting, a man of science." Then he had sat down—suddenly. "I'm very tired," he had said in a low tone, "very tired indeed! I have been walking about all day."

From the very first the lodger's manner had been odd, sometimes distant and abrupt, and then, for no reason at all that she could see, confidential and plaintively confiding. But Mrs. Bunting was aware that eccentricity has always been a perquisite, as it were the special luxury, of the well born and well educated. Scholars and such-like are never quite like other people.

And then, this particular gentleman had proved himself so eminently satisfactory as to the one thing that really matters to those who let lodgings. "My name is Sleuth," he said. "S-l-e-u-t-h. Think

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of a hound, Mrs. Bunting, and you'll never forget my name. I could give you references," he had added, giving her, as she now remembered, a funny sidewise look, "but I prefer to dispense with them. How much did you say? Twenty-three shillings a week, with attendance? Yes, that will suit me perfectly; and I'll begin by paying my first month's rent in advance. Now, four times twenty-three shillings is"—he looked at Mrs. Bunting, and for the first time he smiled, a queer, wry smile—"ninety-two shillings."

He had taken a handful of sovereigns out of his pocket and put them down on the table. "Look here," he had said, "there's five pounds; and you can keep the change, for I shall want you to do a little shopping for me tomorrow."

After he had been in the house about an hour, the bell had rung, and the new lodger had asked Mrs. Bunting if she could oblige him with a loan of a Bible. She brought up to him her best Bible, the one that had been given to her as a wedding present by a lady with whose mother she had lived for several years. This Bible and one other book, of which the odd name was Cruden's Concordance, formed Mr. Sleuth's only reading: he spent hours each day poring over the Old Testament and over the volume which Mrs. Bunting had at last decided to be a queer kind of index to the Book.

However, to return to the lodger's first arrival. He had had no luggage with him, barring the small brown bag, but very soon parcels had begun to arrive addressed to Mr. Sleuth, and it was then that Mrs. Bunting first became curious. These parcels were full of clothes; but it was quite clear to the landlady's feminine eye that none of these clothes had been made for Mr. Sleuth. They were, in fact, secondhand clothes, bought at good secondhand places, each marked, when marked at all, with a different name. And the really extraordinary thing was that occasionally a complete suit disappeared—became, as it were, obliterated from the lodger's wardrobe.

As for the bag he had brought with him, Mrs. Bunting had never caught sight of it again. And this also was certainly very strange.

Mrs. Bunting thought a great deal about that bag. She often wondered what had been in it; not a nightshirt and comb and brush, as she had at first supposed, for Mr. Sleuth had asked her to go out and buy him a brush and comb and toothbrush the morning after his arrival. That fact was specifically impressed on her memory, for at the little shop, a barber's, where she had purchased the brush and comb, the foreigner who had served her had insisted on telling her some of the horrible details of the murder that had taken place the day before in Whitechapel, and it had upset her very much.

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As to where the bag was now, it was probably locked up in the lower part of a chiffonier in the front sitting room. Mr. Sleuth evidently always carried the key of the little cupboard on his person, for Mrs. Bunting, though she looked well for it, had never been able to find it.

And yet never was there a more confiding or trusting gentleman. The first four days that he had been with them he had allowed his money—the considerable sum of one hundred and eighty-four pounds in gold—to lie about wrapped up in pieces of paper on his dressing table. This was a very foolish, indeed a wrong thing to do, as she had allowed herself respectfully to point out to him; but as only answer he had laughed, a loud, discordant shout of laughter.

Mr. Sleuth had many other odd ways; but Mrs. Bunting, a true woman in spite of her prim manner and love of order, had an infinite patience with masculine vagaries.

On the first morning of Mr. Sleuth's stay in the Buntings' house, while Mrs. Bunting was out buying things for him, the new lodger had turned most of the pictures and photographs hanging in his sitting room with their faces to the wall! But this queer action on Mr. Sleuth's part had not surprised Mrs. Bunting as much as it might have done; it recalled an incident of her long-past youth—something that had happened a matter of twenty years ago, at a time when Mrs. Bunting, then the still youthful Ellen Cottrell, had been maid to an old lady. The old lady had a favorite nephew, a bright, jolly young gentleman who had been learning to paint animals in Paris; and it was he who had had the impudence, early one summer morning, to turn to the wall six beautiful engravings of paintings done by the famous Mr. Landseer! The old lady thought the world of those pictures, but her nephew, as only excuse for the extraordinary thing he had done, had observed that "they put his eye out."

Mr. Sleuth's excuse had been much the same, for, when Mrs. Bunting had come to his sitting room and found all her pictures, or at any rate all those of her pictures that happened to be portraits of ladies, with their faces to the wall, he had offered as only explanation, "Those women's eyes follow me about."

Mrs. Bunting had gradually become aware that Mr. Sleuth had a fear and dislike of women. When she was "doing" the staircase and landing, she often heard him reading bits of the Bible aloud to himself, and in the majority of instances the texts he chose contained uncomplimentary reference to her own sex. Only today she had stopped and listened while he uttered threateningly the awful words, "A strange woman is a narrow pit. She also lieth in

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wait as for a prey, and increaseth the transgressors among men." There had been a pause, and then had come, in a high singsong, "Her house is the way to hell, going down on the chambers of death." It had made Mrs. Bunting feel quite queer.

The lodger's daily habits were also peculiar. He stayed in bed all the morning and sometimes part of the afternoon, and he never went out before the streetlamps were alight. Then there was his dislike of an open fire; he generally sat in the top front room, and while there he always used the large gas stove, not only for his experiments, which he carried on at night, but also in the daytime, for warmth.

But there! Where was the use of worrying about the lodger's funny ways? Of course Mr. Sleuth was eccentric; if he hadn't been "just a leetle 'touched' upstairs"—as Bunting had once described it—he wouldn't be their lodger now; he would be living in a quite different sort of way with some of his relations, or with a friend of his own class.

Mrs. Bunting, while these thoughts galloped disconnectedly through her brain, went on with her cooking, doing everything with a certain delicate and cleanly precision.

While in the middle of making the toast on which was to be poured some melted cheese, she suddenly heard a noise, or rather a series of noises. Shuffling, hesitating steps were creaking down the house above. She looked up and listened. Surely Mr. Sleuth was not going out again into the cold, foggy night? But no; for the sounds did not continue down the passage leading to the front door.

The heavy steps were coming slowly down the kitchen stairs. Nearer and nearer came the thudding sounds, and Mrs. Bunting's heart began to beat as if in response. She put out the gas stove, unheedful of the fact that the cheese would stiffen and spoil in the cold air; and then she turned and faced the door. There was a fumbling at the handle, and a moment later the door opened and revealed, as she had known it would, her lodger.

Mr. Sleuth was clad in a plaid dressing gown, and in his hand was a candle. When he saw the lit-up kitchen, and the woman standing in it, he looked inexplicably taken aback, almost aghast.

"Yes, sir? What can I do for you, sir? I hope you didn't ring, sir?" Mrs. Bunting did not come forward to meet her lodger; instead, she held her ground in front of the stove. Mr. Sleuth had no business to come down like this into her kitchen.

"No, I—I didn't ring," he stammered. "I didn't know you were down here, Mrs. Bunting. Please excuse my costume. The truth is, my gas stove has gone wrong, or, rather, that shilling-in-the-slot arrangement has done so. I came down to see if *you* had a gas

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stove. I am going to ask leave to use it tonight for an experiment I want to make."

Mrs. Bunting felt troubled—oddly, unnaturally troubled. Why couldn't the lodger's experiment wait till tomorrow? "Oh, certainly, sir; but you will find it very cold down here." She looked round her dubiously.

"It seems most pleasantly warm," he observed, "warm and cozy after my cold room upstairs."

"Won't you let me make you a fire?" Mrs. Bunting's housewifely instincts were roused. "Do let me make you a fire in your bedroom, sir; I'm sure you ought to have one there these cold nights."

"By no means—I mean, I would prefer not. I do not like an open fire, Mrs. Bunting." He frowned, and still stood, a strange-looking figure, just inside the kitchen door.

"Do you want to use this stove now, sir? Is there anything I can do to help you?"

"No, not now—thank you all the same, Mrs. Bunting. I shall come down later, altogether later—probably after you and your husband have gone to bed. But I should be much obliged if you would see that the gas people come tomorrow and put my stove in order."

"Perhaps Bunting could put it right for you, sir. I'll ask him to go up."

"No, no—I don't want anything of that sort done tonight. Besides, he couldn't put it right. The cause of the trouble is quite simple. The machine is choked up with shillings: a foolish plan, so I have always felt it to be."

Mr. Sleuth spoke very pettishly, with far more heat than he was wont to speak; but Mrs. Bunting sympathized with him. She had always suspected those slot-machines to be as dishonest as if they were human. It was dreadful, the way they swallowed up the shillings!

As if he were divining her thoughts, Mr. Sleuth, walking forward, stared up at the kitchen slot-machine. "Is it nearly full?" he asked abruptly. "I expect my experiment will take some time, Mrs. Bunting."

"Oh, no, sir; there's plenty of room for shillings there still. We don't use our stove as much as you do yours, sir. I'm never in the kitchen a minute longer than I can help this cold weather."

And then, with him preceding her, Mrs. Bunting and her lodger made a slow progress to the ground floor. There Mr. Sleuth courteously bade his landlady good night and proceeded upstairs to his own apartments.

Mrs. Bunting again went down into her kitchen, again she lit the

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stove, and again she cooked the toasted cheese. But she felt unnerved, afraid of she knew not what. The place seemed to her alive with alien presences, and once she caught herself listening, which was absurd, for of course she could not hope to hear what her lodger was doing two, if not three, flights upstairs. She had never been able to discover what Mr. Sleuth's experiments really were; all she knew was that they required a very high degree of heat.

The Buntings went to bed early that night. But Mrs. Bunting intended to stay awake. She wanted to know at what hour of the night her lodger would come down into the kitchen, and, above all, she was anxious as to how long he would stay there. But she had had a long day, and presently she fell asleep.

The church clock hard by struck two in the morning, and suddenly Mrs. Bunting awoke. She felt sharply annoyed with herself. How could she have dropped off like that? Mr. Sleuth must have been down and up again hours ago.

Then, gradually, she became aware of a faint acrid odor; elusive, almost intangible, it yet seemed to encompass her and the snoring man by her side almost as a vapor might have done.

Mrs. Bunting sat up in bed and sniffed; and then, in spite of the cold, she quietly crept out of the nice, warm bedclothes and crawled along to the bottom of the bed. There Mr. Sleuth's landlady did a very curious thing; she leaned over the brass rail and put her face close to the hinge of the door. Yes, it was from there that this strange, horrible odor was coming; the smell must be very strong in the passage. Mrs. Bunting thought she knew now what became of those suits of clothes of Mr. Sleuth's that disappeared.

As she crept back, shivering, under the bedclothes, she longed to give her sleeping husband a good shake, and in fancy she heard herself saying: "Bunting, get up! There is something strange going on downstairs that we ought to know about."

But Mr. Sleuth's landlady, as she lay by her husband's side, listening with painful intentness, knew very well that she would do nothing of the sort. The lodger had a right to destroy his clothes by burning if the fancy took him. What if he did make a certain amount of mess, a certain amount of smell, in her nice kitchen? Was he not—was he not such a good lodger! If they did anything to upset him, where could they ever hope to get another like him?

Three o'clock struck before Mrs. Bunting heard slow, heavy steps creaking up her kitchen stairs. But Mr. Sleuth did not go straight up to his own quarters, as she expected him to do. Instead, he went to the front door and, opening it, put it on the chain. At the end of ten minutes or so he closed the front door, and by that time Mrs. Bunting had divined why the lodger had behaved in this

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strange fashion—it must have been to get the strong acrid smell of burning wool out of the passage. But Mrs. Bunting felt as if she herself would never get rid of the horrible odor. She felt herself to be all smell.

At last the unhappy woman fell into a deep, troubled sleep; and then she dreamed a most terrible and unnatural dream; hoarse voices seemed to be shouting in her ear, "'Orrible murder off the Edgeware Road!" Then three words, indistinctly uttered, followed by "—at his work again! Awful details!"

Even in her dream Mrs. Bunting felt angered and impatient; she knew so well why she was being disturbed by this horrid nightmare. It was because of Bunting—Bunting, who insisted on talking to her of those frightful murders, in which only morbid, vulgar-minded people took any interest. Why, even now, in her dream, she could hear her husband speaking to her about it.

"Ellen"—so she heard Bunting say in her ear—"Ellen, my dear, I am just going to get up to get a paper. It's after seven o'clock."

Mrs. Bunting sat up in bed. The shouting, nay, worse, the sound of tramping, hurrying feet smote on her ears. It had been no nightmare, then, but something infinitely worse—reality. Why couldn't Bunting have lain quietly in bed awhile longer, and let his poor wife go on dreaming? The most awful dream would have been easier to bear than this awakening.

She heard her husband go to the front door, and, as he bought the paper, exchange a few excited words with the newspaper boy. Then he came back and began silently moving about the room.

"Well!" she cried. "Why don't you tell me about it?"

"I thought you'd rather not hear."

"Of course I like to know what happens close to our own front door!" she snapped out.

And then he read out a piece of the newspaper—only a few lines, after all—telling in brief, unemotional language that the body of a woman, apparently done to death in a peculiarly atrocious fashion some hours before, had been found in a passage leading to a disused warehouse off the Marylebone Road.

"It serves that sort of hussy right!" was Mrs. Bunting's only comment.

When Mrs. Bunting went down into the kitchen, everything there looked just as she had left it, and there was no trace of the acrid smell she had expected to find there. Instead, the cavernous whitewashed room was full of fog, and she noticed that, though the shutters were bolted and barred as she had left them, the windows behind them had been widely opened to the air. She, of course, had left them shut.

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She stooped and flung open the oven door of her gas-stove. Yes, it was as she had expected; a fierce heat had been generated there since she had last used the oven, and a mass of black, gluey soot had fallen through to the stone floor below.

Mrs. Bunting took the ham and eggs that she had bought the previous day for her own and Bunting's breakfast, and broiled them over the gas ring in their sitting room. Her husband watched her in surprised silence. She had never done such a thing before.

"I couldn't stay down there," she said, "it was so cold and foggy. I thought I'd make breakfast up here, just for today."

"Yes," he said kindly, "that's quite right, Ellen. I think you've done quite right, my dear."

But when it came to the point, his wife could not eat any of the nice breakfast she had got ready; she only had another cup of tea.

"Are you ill?" Bunting asked solicitously.

"No," she said shortly, "of course I'm not ill. Don't be silly! The thought of that horrible thing happening so close by has upset me. Just hark to them, now!"

Through their closed windows penetrated the sound of scurrying feet and loud, ribald laughter. A crowd, nay, a mob, hastened to and from the scene of the murder.

Mrs. Bunting made her husband lock the front gate. "I don't want any of those ghouls in here!" she exclaimed angrily. And then, "What a lot of idle people there must be in the world," she said.

The coming and going went on all day. Mrs. Bunting stayed indoors; Bunting went out. After all, the ex-butler was human—it was natural that he should feel thrilled and excited. All their neighbors were the same. His wife wasn't reasonable about such things. She quarreled with him when he didn't tell her anything, and yet he was sure she would have been angry with him if he had said very much about it.

The lodger's bell rang about two o'clock, and Mrs. Bunting prepared the simple luncheon that was also his breakfast. As she rested the tray a minute on the drawing-room floor landing, she heard Mr. Sleuth's high, quavering voice reading aloud the words:

"She saith to him, Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. But he knoweth not that the dead are there; and that her guests are in the depths of hell."

The landlady turned the handle of the door and walked in with the tray. Mr. Sleuth was sitting close by the window, and Mrs. Bunting's Bible lay open before him. As she came in he hastily closed the Bible and looked down at the crowd walking along the Marylebone Road.

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"There seem a great many people out today," he observed, without looking round.

"Yes, sir, there do." Mrs. Bunting said nothing more, and offered no other explanation; and the lodger, as he at last turned to his landlady, smiled pleasantly. He had acquired a great liking and respect for this well-behaved, taciturn woman; she was the first person for whom he had felt any such feeling for many years past.

He took a half sovereign out of his waistcoat pocket; Mrs. Bunting noticed that it was not the same waistcoat Mr. Sleuth had been wearing the day before. "Will you please accept this half sovereign for the use of your kitchen last night?" he said. "I made as little mess as I could, but I was carrying on a rather elaborate experiment."

She held out her hand, hesitated, and then took the coin.

As she walked down the stairs, the winter sun, a yellow ball hanging in the smoky sky, glinted in on Mrs. Bunting, and lent blood-red gleams, or so it seemed to her, to the piece of gold she was holding in her hand.

It was a very cold night—so cold, so windy, so snow-laden the atmosphere, that everyone who could do so stayed indoors. Bunting, however, was on his way home from what had proved a very pleasant job; he had been acting as waiter at a young lady's birthday party, and a remarkable piece of luck had come his way. The young lady had come into a fortune that day, and she had had the gracious, the surprising thought of presenting each of the hired waiters with a sovereign.

This birthday treat had put him in mind of another birthday. His daughter Daisy would be eighteen the following Saturday. Why shouldn't he send her a postal order for half a sovereign, so that she might come up and spend her birthday in London?

Having Daisy for three or four days would cheer up Ellen. Mr. Bunting, slackening his footsteps, began to think with puzzled concern of how queer his wife had seemed lately. She had become so nervous, so "jumpy," that he didn't know what to make of her sometimes. She had never been a really good-tempered woman—your capable, self-respecting woman seldom is—but she had never been like what she was now. Of late she sometimes got quite hysterical; he had let fall a sharp word to her the other day, and she had sat down on a chair, thrown her black apron over her face, and burst out sobbing violently.

During the last ten days Ellen had taken to talking in her sleep. "No, no, no!" she had cried out, only the night before. "It isn't true! I won't have it said! It's a lie!" And there had been a wail of horrible fear and revolt in her unusually quiet, mincing voice. Yes, it

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would certainly be a good thing for her to have Daisy's company for a bit. Whew! It *was* cold; and Bunting had stupidly forgotten his gloves. He put his hands in his pockets to keep them warm.

Suddenly he became aware that Mr. Sleuth, the lodger who seemed to have "turned their luck," as it were, was walking along on the opposite side of the solitary street.

Mr. Sleuth's tall, thin figure was rather bowed, his head bent toward the ground. His right arm was thrust into his long Inverness cape; the other occasionally sawed the air, doubtless in order to help him keep warm. He was walking rather quickly. It was clear that he had not yet become aware of the proximity of his landlord.

Bunting felt pleased to see his lodger; it increased his feeling of general satisfaction. Strange, was it not, that that odd, peculiar-looking figure should have made all the difference to his (Bunting's) and Mrs. Bunting's happiness and comfort in life?

Naturally, Bunting saw far less of the lodger than did Mrs. Bunting. Their gentleman had made it very clear that he did not like either the husband or wife to come up to his rooms without being definitely asked to do so, and Bunting had been up there only once since Mr. Sleuth's arrival five weeks before. This seemed to be a good opportunity for a little genial conversation.

Bunting, still an active man for his years, crossed the road and, stepping briskly forward, tried to overtake Mr. Sleuth; but the more he hurried, the more the other hastened, and that without even turning to see whose steps he heard echoing behind him on the now freezing pavement.

Mr. Sleuth's own footsteps were quite inaudible—an odd circumstance, when you came to think of it, as Bunting did think of it later, lying awake by Ellen's side in the pitch-darkness. What it meant was, of course, that the lodger had rubber soles on his shoes.

The two men, the pursued and the pursuer, at last turned into the Marylebone Road. They were now within a hundred yards of home, and so, plucking up courage, Bunting called out, his voice echoing freshly on the still air:

"Mr. Sleuth, sir! Mr. Sleuth!"

The lodger stopped and turned round. He had been walking so quickly, and he was in so poor a physical condition, that the sweat was pouring down his face.

"Ah! So it's you, Mr. Bunting? I heard footsteps behind me, and I hurried on. I wish I'd known that it was only you; there are so many queer characters about at night in London."

"Not on a night like this, sir. Only honest folk who have business out of doors would be out such a night as this. It *is* cold, sir!" And

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then into Bunting's slow and honest mind there suddenly crept the query as to what Mr. Sleuth's own business out could be on this cold, bitter night.

"Cold?" the lodger repeated. "I can't say that I find it cold, Mr. Bunting. When the snow falls the air always becomes milder."

"Yes, sir, but tonight there's such a sharp east wind. Why, it freezes the very marrow in one's bones!"

Bunting noticed that Mr. Sleuth kept his distance in a rather strange way: he walked at the edge of the pavement, leaving the rest of it, on the wall side, to his landlord.

"I lost my way," he said abruptly. "I've been over Primrose Hill to see a friend of mine, and then, coming back, I lost my way."

Bunting could well believe that, for when he had first noticed Mr. Sleuth he was coming from the east, and not, as he should have done if walking home from Primrose Hill, from the north.

They had now reached the little gate that gave onto the shabby, paved court in front of the house. Mr. Sleuth was walking up the flagged path, when, with a "By your leave, sir," the ex-butler, stepping aside, slipped in front of his lodger, in order to open the front door for him.

As he passed by Mr. Sleuth the back of Bunting's bare left hand brushed lightly against the long Inverness cape the other man was wearing, and, to his surprise, the stretch of cloth against which his hand lay for a moment was not only damp, damp from the flakes of snow that had settled upon it, but wet—wet and gluey. Bunting thrust his left hand into his pocket; it was with the other that he placed the key in the lock of the door.

The two men passed into the hall together. The house seemed blackly dark in comparison with the lighted-up road outside; and then, quite suddenly, there came over Bunting a feeling of mortal terror, an instinctive knowledge that some terrible and immediate danger was near him. A voice—the voice of his first wife, the long-dead girl to whom his mind so seldom reverted nowadays—uttered in his ear the words, "Take care!"

"I'm afraid, Mr. Bunting, that you must have felt something dirty, foul, on my coat? It's too long a story to tell you now, but I brushed up against a dead animal—a dead rabbit lying across a bench on Primrose Hill."

Mr. Sleuth spoke in a very quiet voice, almost in a whisper.

"No, sir, no, I didn't notice nothing. I scarcely touched you, sir." It seemed as if a power outside himself compelled Bunting to utter these lying words. "And now, sir, I'll be saying good night to you," he added.

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He waited until the lodger had gone upstairs, and then he turned into his own sitting room. There he sat down, for he felt very queer. He did not draw his left hand out of his pocket till he heard the other man moving about in the room above. Then he lit the gas and held up his left hand; he put it close to his face. It was flecked, streaked with blood.

He took off his boots, and then, very quietly, he went into the room where his wife lay asleep. Stealthily he walked across to the toilet table and dipped his hand into the water jug.

The next morning Mr. Sleuth's landlord awoke with a start; he felt curiously heavy about the limbs and tired about the eyes.

Drawing his watch from under his pillow, he saw that it was nearly nine o'clock. He and Ellen had overslept. Without waking her, he got out of bed and pulled up the blind. It was snowing heavily, and, as is the way when it snows, even in London, it was strangely, curiously still.

After he had dressed he went out into the passage. A newspaper and a letter were lying on the mat. Fancy having slept through the postman's knock! He picked them both up and went into the sitting room; then he carefully shut the door behind him and, tossing the letter aside, spread the newspaper wide open on the table and bent over it.

As Bunting at last looked up and straightened himself, a look of inexpressible relief shone upon his stolid face. The item of news he had felt certain would be there, printed in big type on the middle sheet, was not there.

He folded the paper and laid it on a chair, and then eagerly took up his letter.

> Dear Father [it ran]: I hope this finds you as well as it leaves me. Mrs. Puddle's youngest child has got scarlet fever, and aunt thinks I had better come away at once, just to stay with you for a few days. Please tell Ellen I won't give her no trouble.
>
> Your loving daughter,
> Daisy

Bunting felt amazingly lighthearted, and, as he walked into the next room, he smiled broadly.

"Ellen," he cried out, "here's news! Daisy's coming today. There's scarlet fever in their house, and Martha thinks she had better come away for a few days. She'll be here for her birthday!"

Mrs. Bunting listened in silence; she did not even open her eyes.

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"I can't have the girl here just now," she said shortly. "I've got just as much as I can manage to do."

But Bunting felt pugnacious, and so cheerful as to be almost lightheaded. Deep down in his heart he looked back to last night with a feeling of shame and self-rebuke. Whatever had made such horrible thoughts and suspicions come into his head?

"Of course Daisy will come here," he said shortly. "If it comes to that, she'll be able to help you with the work, and she'll brisk us both up a bit."

Rather to his surprise, Mrs. Bunting said nothing in answer to this, and he changed the subject abruptly. "The lodger and me came in together last night," he observed. "He's certainly a funny kind of gentleman. It wasn't the sort of night one would choose to go for a walk over Primrose Hill, and yet that was what he had been doing—so he said."

It stopped snowing about ten o'clock, and the morning wore itself away.

Just as twelve was striking, a four-wheeler drew up to the gate. It was Daisy—pink-cheeked, excited, laughing-eyed Daisy, a sight to gladden any father's heart. "Aunt said I was to have a cab if the weather was bad," she said.

There was a bit of a wrangle over the fare. King's Cross, as all the world knows, is nothing like two miles from the Marylebone Road, but the man clamored for one-and-sixpence, and hinted darkly that he had done the young lady a favor in bringing her at all.

While he and Bunting were having words, Daisy, leaving them to it, walked up the path to the door where her stepmother was awaiting her.

Suddenly there fell loud shouts on the still air. They sounded strangely eerie, breaking sharply across the muffled, snowy air.

"What's that?" said Bunting, with a look of startled fear. "Why, whatever's that?"

The cabman lowered his voice: "Them are crying out that 'orrible affair at King's Cross. He's done for two of 'em this time! That's what I meant when I said I might have got a better fare. I wouldn't say anything before Missy there, but folk 'ave been coming from all over London—like a fire; plenty of toffs, too. But there—there's nothing to see now!"

"What! Another woman murdered last night?" Bunting felt and looked convulsed with horror.

The cabman stared at him, surprised. "Two of 'em, I tell yer—within a few yards of one another. He 'ave got a nerve—"

"Have they caught him?" asked Bunting perfunctorily.

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"Lord, no! They'll never catch 'im! It must 'ave happened hours and hours ago—they was both stone-cold. One each end of an archway. That's why they didn't see 'em before."

The hoarse cries were coming nearer and nearer—two news vendors trying to outshout each other.

"'Orrible discovery near King's Cross!" they yelled exultantly. And as Bunting, with his daughter's bag in his hand, hurried up the path and passed through his front door, the words pursued him like a dreadful threat.

Angrily he shut out the hoarse, insistent cries. No, he had no wish to buy a paper. That kind of crime wasn't fit reading for a young girl, such a girl as was his Daisy, brought up as carefully as if she had been a young lady by her strict Methody aunt.

As he stood in his little hall, trying to feel "all right" again, he could hear Daisy's voice—high, voluble, excited—giving her stepmother a long account of the scarlet fever case to which she owed her presence in London. But as Bunting pushed open the door of the sitting room, there came a note of sharp alarm in his daughter's voice, and he heard her say: "Why, Ellen! Whatever is the matter? You do look bad!" and his wife's muffled answer: "Open the window—do."

Rushing across the room, Bunting pushed up the sash. The newspaper sellers were now just outside the house. "Horrible discovery near King's Cross—a clue to the murderer!" they yelled. And then, helplessly, Mrs. Bunting began to laugh. She laughed and laughed and laughed, rocking herself to and fro as if in an ecstasy of mirth.

"Why, Father, whatever's the matter with her?" Daisy looked quite scared.

"She's in 'sterics—that's what it is," he said shortly. "I'll just get the water jug. Wait a minute."

Bunting felt very put out, and yet glad, too, for this queer seizure of Ellen's almost made him forget the sick terror with which he had been possessed a moment before. That he and his wife should be obsessed by the same fear, the same terror, never crossed his simple, slow-working mind.

The lodger's bell rang. That, or the threat of the water jug, had a magical effect on Mrs. Bunting. She rose to her feet, still trembling, but composed.

As Mrs. Bunting went upstairs she felt her legs trembling under her, and put out a shaking hand to clutch at the banister for support. She waited a few minutes on the landing, and then knocked at the door of her lodger's parlor.

But Mr. Sleuth's voice answered her from the bedroom. "I'm not

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well," he called out querulously; "I think I caught a chill going out to see a friend last night. I'd be obliged if you'll bring me up a cup of tea and put it outside my door, Mrs. Bunting."

"Very well, sir."

Mrs. Bunting went downstairs and made her lodger a cup of tea over the gas ring, Bunting watching her the while in heavy silence.

During their midday dinner the husband and wife had a little discussion as to where Daisy should sleep. It had already been settled that a bed should be made up for her in the sitting room, but Bunting saw reason to change this plan. As the two women were clearing away the dishes, he looked up and said shortly: "I think 'twould be better if Daisy were to sleep with you, Ellen, and I were to sleep in the sitting room."

Ellen acquiesced quietly.

Daisy was a good-natured girl; she liked London, and wanted to make herself useful to her stepmother. "I'll wash up; don't you bother to come downstairs," she said.

Bunting began to walk up and down the room. His wife gave him a furtive glance; she wondered what he was thinking about.

"Didn't you get a paper?" she said at last.

"There's the paper," he said crossly, "the paper we always do take in, the *Telegraph*." His look challenged her to a further question.

"I thought they were shouting something in the street—I mean just before I was took bad."

But he made no answer; instead, he went to the top of the staircase and called out sharply: "Daisy! Daisy, child, are you there?"

"Yes, Father," she answered from below.

"Better come upstairs out of that cold kitchen."

He came back into the sitting room again.

"Ellen, is the lodger in? I haven't heard him moving about. I don't want Daisy to be mixed up with him."

"Mr. Sleuth is not well today," his wife answered. "He is remaining in bed a bit. Daisy needn't have anything to do with him. She'll have her work cut out looking after things down here. That's where I want her to help me."

"Agreed," he said.

When it grew dark, Bunting went out and bought an evening paper. He read it out of doors in the biting cold, standing beneath a streetlamp. He wanted to see what was the clue to the murderer.

The clue proved to be a very slender one—merely the imprint in the snowy slush of a half-worn rubber sole; and it was, of course, by no means certain that the sole belonged to the boot or shoe of the murderer of the two doomed women who had met so swift and awful a death in the arch near King's Cross station. The

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paper's special investigator pointed out that there were thousands of such soles being worn in London. Bunting found comfort in that obvious fact. He felt grateful to the special investigator for having stated it so clearly.

As he approached his house, he heard curious sounds coming from the inner side of the low wall that shut off the courtyard from the pavement. Under ordinary circumstances Bunting would have gone at once to drive whoever was there out into the roadway. Now he stayed outside, sick with suspense and anxiety. Was it possible that their place was being watched—already?

But it was only Mr. Sleuth. To Bunting's astonishment, the lodger suddenly stepped forward from behind the wall onto the flagged path. He was carrying a brown-paper parcel, and as he walked along the new boots he was wearing creaked and the tap-tap of wooden heels rang out on the stones.

Bunting, still hidden outside the gate, suddenly understood what his lodger had been doing the other side of the wall. Mr. Sleuth had been out to buy himself a pair of boots and had gone inside the gate to put them on, placing his old footgear in the paper in which the new boots had been wrapped.

Bunting waited until Mr. Sleuth had let himself into the house; then he also walked up the flagged pathway, and put his latchkey in the door.

In the next three days each of Bunting's waking hours held its meed of aching fear and suspense. From his point of view, almost any alternative would be preferable to that which to most people would have seemed the only one open to him. He told himself that it would be ruin for him and for his Ellen to be mixed up publicly in such a terrible affair. It would track them to their dying day.

Bunting was also always debating within himself as to whether he should tell Ellen of his frightful suspicion. He could not believe that what had become so plain to himself could long be concealed from all the world, and yet he did not credit his wife with the same intelligence. He did not even notice that, although she waited on Mr. Sleuth as assiduously as ever, Mrs. Bunting never mentioned the lodger.

Mr. Sleuth, meanwhile, kept upstairs; he had given up going out altogether. He still felt, so he assured his landlady, far from well.

Daisy was another complication, the more so that the girl, whom her father longed to send away and whom he would hardly let out of his sight, showed herself inconveniently inquisitive concerning the lodger.

"Whatever does he do with himself all day?" she asked her stepmother.

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"Well, just now he's reading the Bible," Mrs. Bunting had answered very shortly and dryly.

"Well, I never! That's a funny thing for a gentleman to do!" Such had been Daisy's pert remark, and her stepmother had snubbed her well for it.

Daisy's eighteenth birthday dawned uneventfully. Her father gave her what he had always promised she should have on her eighteenth birthday—a watch. It was a pretty little silver watch, which Bunting had bought secondhand on the last day he had been happy; it seemed a long time ago now.

Mrs. Bunting thought a silver watch a very extravagant present, but she had always had the good sense not to interfere between her husband and his child. Besides, her mind was now full of other things. She was beginning to fear that Bunting suspected something, and she was filled with watchful anxiety and unease. What if he were to do anything silly—mix them up with the police, for instance? It certainly would be ruination to them both. But there—one never knew, with men! Her husband, however, kept his own counsel absolutely.

Daisy's birthday was on Saturday. In the middle of the morning Ellen and Daisy went down into the kitchen. Bunting didn't like the feeling that there was only one flight of stairs between Mr. Sleuth and himself, so he quietly slipped out of the house and went to buy himself an ounce of tobacco.

In the last four days Bunting had avoided his usual haunts. But today the unfortunate man had a curious longing for human companionship—companionship, that is, other than that of Ellen and Daisy. This feeling led him into a small, populous thoroughfare hard by the Edgeware Road. There were more people there than usual, for the housewives of the neighborhood were doing their marketing for Sunday.

Bunting passed the time of day with the tobacconist, and the two fell into desultory talk. To the ex-butler's surprise, the man said nothing at all to him on the subject of which all the neighborhood must still be talking.

And then, quite suddenly, while still standing by the counter, and before he had paid for the packet of tobacco he held in his hand, Bunting, through the open door, saw, with horrified surprise, that his wife was standing outside a greengrocer's shop just opposite. Muttering a word of apology, he rushed out of the shop and across the road.

"Ellen!" he gasped hoarsely. "You've never gone and left my little girl alone in the house?"

Mrs. Bunting's face went chalky white. "I thought you were

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indoors," she said. "You *were* indoors. Whatever made you come out for, without first making sure I was there?"

Bunting made no answer; but, as they stared at each other in exasperated silence, *each knew that the other knew.*

They turned and scurried down the street.

"Don't run," he said suddenly. "We shall get there just as quickly if we walk fast. People are noticing you, Ellen. Don't run."

He spoke breathlessly, but it was breathlessness induced by fear and excitement, not by the quick pace at which they were walking.

At last they reached their own gate. Bunting pushed past in front of his wife. After all, Daisy was his child—Ellen couldn't know how he was feeling. He made the path almost in one leap, and fumbled for a moment with his latchkey. The door opened.

"Daisy!" he called out in a wailing voice. "Daisy, my dear, where are you?"

"Here I am, Father; what is it?"

"She's all right!" Bunting turned his gray face to his wife. "She's all right, Ellen!" Then he waited a moment, leaning against the wall of the passage. "It did give me a turn," he said. And then, warningly, "Don't frighten the girl, Ellen."

Daisy was standing before the fire in the sitting room, admiring herself in the glass. "Oh, Father," she said, without turning round, "I've seen the lodger! He's quite a nice gentleman—though, to be sure, he does look a cure! He came down to ask Ellen for something, and we had quite a nice little chat. I told him it was my birthday, and he asked me to go to Madame Tussaud's with him this afternoon." She laughed a little self-consciously. "Of course I could see he was 'centric, and then at first he spoke so funnily. 'And who be you?' he says, threatening-like. And I says to him, "I'm Mr. Bunting's daughter, sir.' 'Then you're a very fortunate girl'—that's what he said, Ellen—'to 'ave such a nice stepmother as you've got. That's why,' he says, 'you look such a good, innocent girl.' And then he quoted a bit of the prayer book at me. 'Keep innocency,' he says, wagging his head at me. Lor'! It made me feel as if I was with Aunt again."

"I won't have you going out with the lodger—that's flat." He was wiping his forehead with one hand, while with the other he mechanically squeezed the little packet of tobacco, for which, as he now remembered, he had forgotten to pay.

Daisy pouted. "Oh, Father, I think you might let me have a treat on my birthday! I told him Saturday wasn't a very good day—at least, so I'd heard—for Madame Tussaud's. Then he said we could go early, while the fine folk are still having their dinners. He wants you to come, too." She turned to her stepmother, then giggled

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happily. "The lodger has a wonderful fancy for you, Ellen; if I was Father, I'd feel quite jealous!"

Her last words were cut across by a loud knock on the door. Bunting and his wife looked at each other apprehensively.

Both felt a curious thrill of relief when they saw that it was only Mr. Sleuth—Mr. Sleuth dressed to go out: the tall hat he had worn when he first came to them was in his hand, and he was wearing a heavy overcoat.

"I saw you had come in"—he addressed Mrs. Bunting in his high, whistling, hesitating voice—"and so I've come down to ask if you and Miss Bunting will come to Madame Tussaud's now. I have never seen these famous waxworks, though I've heard of the place all my life."

As Bunting forced himself to look fixedly at his lodger, a sudden doubt, bringing with it a sense of immeasurable relief, came to him. Surely it was inconceivable that this gentle, mild-mannered gentleman could be the monster of cruelty and cunning that Bunting had but a moment ago believed him to be!

"You're very kind, sir, I'm sure." He tried to catch his wife's eye, but Mrs. Bunting was looking away, staring into vacancy. She still, of course, wore the bonnet and cloak in which she had just been out to do her marketing. Daisy was already putting on her hat and coat.

Madame Tussaud's had hitherto held pleasant memories for Mrs. Bunting. In the days when she and Bunting were courting they often spent part of their "afternoon out" there. The butler had an acquaintance, a man named Hopkins, who was one of the waxworks' staff, and this man had sometimes given him passes for "self and lady." But this was the first time Mrs. Bunting had been inside the place since she had come to live almost next door, as it were, to the big building.

The ill-sorted trio walked up the great staircase and into the first gallery; and there Mr. Sleuth suddenly stopped short. The presence of those curious, still figures, suggesting death in life, seemed to surprise and affright him.

Daisy took quick advantage of the lodger's hesitation and unease.

"Oh, Ellen," she cried, "do let us begin by going into the Chamber of Horrors! I've never been in there. Aunt made Father promise he wouldn't take me, the only time I've ever been here. But now that I'm eighteen I can do just as I like; besides, Aunt will never know!"

Mr. Sleuth looked down at her.

"Yes," he said, "let us go into the Chamber of Horrors; that's a good idea, Miss Bunting."

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They turned into the great room in which the Napoleonic relics are kept, and which leads into the curious, vaultlike chamber where waxen effigies of dead criminals stand grouped in wooden docks. Mrs. Bunting was at once disturbed and relieved to see her husband's old acquaintance, Mr. Hopkins, in charge of the turnstile admitting the public to the Chamber of Horrors.

"Well, you *are* a stranger," the man observed genially. "I do believe this is the very first time I've seen you in here, Mrs. Bunting, since you married!"

"Yes," she said, "that is so. And this is my husband's daughter, Daisy. I expect you've heard of her, Mr. Hopkins. And this"—she hesitated a moment—"is our lodger, Mr. Sleuth."

But Mr. Sleuth frowned and shuffled away. Daisy, leaving her stepmother's side, joined him.

Mrs. Bunting put down three sixpences.

"Wait a minute," said Hopkins. "You can't go into the Chamber of Horrors just yet. But you won't have to wait more than four or five minutes, Mrs. Bunting. It's this way, you see; our boss is in there, showing a party round." He lowered his voice. "It's Sir John Burney—I suppose you know who Sir John Burney is?"

"No," she answered indifferently, "I don't know that I ever heard of him." She felt slightly—oh, very slightly—uneasy about Daisy. She would like her stepdaughter to keep well within sight and sound. Mr. Sleuth was taking the girl to the other end of the room.

"Well, I hope you never *will* know him—not in any personal sense, Mrs. Bunting." The man chuckled. "He's the Head Commissioner of Police—that's what Sir John Burney is. One of the gentlemen he's showing round our place is the Paris Prefect of Police, whose job is on all fours, so to speak, with Sir John's. The Frenchy has brought his daughter with him, and there are several other ladies. Ladies always like 'orrors, Mrs. Bunting; that's our experience here. 'Oh, take me to the Chamber of 'Orrors!'—that's what they say the minute they gets into the building."

A group of people, all talking and laughing together, were advancing from within toward the turnstile.

Mrs. Bunting stared at them nervously. She wondered which of them was the gentleman with whom Mr. Hopkins had hoped she would never be brought into personal contact. She quickly picked him out. He was a tall, powerful, nice-looking gentleman with a commanding manner. Just now he was smiling down into the face of a young lady. "Monsieur Barberoux is quite right," he was saying, "the English law is too kind to the criminal, especially to the murderer. If we conducted our trials in the French fashion, the place we have just left would be very much fuller than it is today!

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A man of whose guilt we are absolutely assured is oftener than not acquitted, and then the public taunt us with 'another undiscovered crime'!"

"D'you mean, Sir John, that murderers sometimes escape scot-free? Take the man who has been committing all those awful murders this last month. Of course, I don't know much about it, for Father won't let me read about it, but I can't help being interested!" Her girlish voice rang out, and Mrs. Bunting heard every word distinctly.

The party gathered round, listening eagerly to hear what the Head Commissioner would say next.

"Yes." He spoke very deliberately. "I think we may say—now, don't give me away to a newspaper fellow, Miss Rose—that we do know perfectly well who the murderer in question is—"

Several of those standing nearby uttered expressions of surprise and incredulity.

"Then why don't you catch him?" cried the girl indignantly.

"I didn't say we know *where* he is; I only said we know *who* he is; or rather, perhaps I ought to say that we have a very strong suspicion of his identity."

Sir John's French colleague looked up quickly. "The Hamburg and Liverpool man?" he said interrogatively.

The other nodded. "Yes. I suppose you've had the case turned up?"

Then, speaking very quickly, as if he wished to dismiss the subject from his own mind and from that of his auditors, he went on:

"Two murders of the kind were committed eight years ago—one in Hamburg, the other just afterward in Liverpool, and there were certain peculiarities connected with the crimes which made it clear they were committed by the same hand. The perpetrator was caught, fortunately for us red-handed, just as he was leaving the house of his victim, for in Liverpool the murder was committed in a house. I myself saw the unhappy man—I say unhappy, for there is no doubt at all that he was mad"—he hesitated, and added in a lower tone—"suffering from an acute form of religious mania. I myself saw him, at some length. But now comes the really interesting point. Just a month ago this criminal lunatic, as we must regard him, made his escape from the asylum where he was confined. He arranged the whole thing with extraordinary cunning and intelligence, and we should probably have caught him long ago were it not that he managed, when on his way out of the place, to annex a considerable sum of money in gold with which the wages of the staff were about to be paid."

The Frenchman again spoke. "Why have you not circulated a description?" he asked.

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"We did that at once"—Sir John Burney smiled a little grimly—"but only among our own people. We dare not circulate the man's description among the general public. You see, we may be mistaken, after all."

"That is not very probable!" The Frenchman smiled a satirical little smile.

A moment later the party were walking in Indian file through the turnstile, Sir John Burney leading the way.

Mrs. Bunting looked straight before her. Even had she wished to do so, she had neither time nor power to warn her lodger of his danger.

Daisy and her companion were now coming down the room, bearing straight for the Head Commissioner of Police. In another moment Mr. Sleuth and Sir John Burney would be face to face.

Suddenly Mr. Sleuth swerved to one side. A terrible change came over his pale, narrow face; it became discomposed, livid with rage and terror.

But, to Mrs. Bunting's relief—yes, to her inexpressible relief—Sir John Burney and his friends swept on. They passed by Mr. Sleuth unconcernedly, unaware, or so it seemed to her, that there was anyone else in the room but themselves.

"Hurry up, Mrs. Bunting," said the turnstile keeper. "You and your friends will have the place all to yourselves." From an official he had become a man, and it was the man in Mr. Hopkins that gallantly addressed pretty Daisy Bunting. "It seems strange that a young lady like you should want to go in and see all those 'orrible frights," he said jestingly.

"Mrs. Bunting, may I trouble you to come over here for a moment?" The words were hissed rather than spoken by Mr. Sleuth's lips.

His landlady took a doubtful step forward.

"A last word with you, Mrs. Bunting." The lodger's face was still distorted with fear and passion. "Do you think to escape the consequences of your hideous treachery? I trusted you, Mrs. Bunting, and you betrayed me! But I am protected by a higher power, for I still have work to do. Your end will be bitter as wormwood and sharp as a two-edged sword. Your feet shall go down to death, and your steps take hold on hell." Even while Mr. Sleuth was uttering these strange, dreadful words, he was looking around, his eyes glancing this way and that, seeking a way of escape.

At last his eyes became fixed on a small placard placed about a curtain. "Emergency Exit" was written there. Leaving his landlady's side, he walked over to the turnstile. He fumbled in his pocket for a moment, and then touched the man on the arm. "I

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feel ill," he said, speaking very rapidly, "very ill indeed! It's the atmosphere of this place. I want you to let me out by the quickest way. It would be a pity for me to faint here—especially with ladies about." His left hand shot out and placed what he had been fumbling for in his pocket on the other's bare palm. "I see there's an emergency exit over there. Would it be possible for me to get out that way?"

"Well, yes, sir. I think so." The man hesitated; he felt a slight, a very slight, feeling of misgiving. He looked at Daisy, flushed and smiling, happy and unconcerned, and then at Mrs. Bunting. She was very pale, but surely her lodger's sudden seizure was enough to make her feel worried. Hopkins felt the half sovereign pleasantly tickling his palm. The Prefect of Police had given him only half a crown—mean, shabby foreigner!

"Yes, I can let you out that way," he said at last, "and perhaps when you're standing out in the air on the iron balcony you'll feel better. But then, you know sir, you'll have to come round to the front if you want to come in again, for those emergency doors only open outward."

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Sleuth hurriedly, "I quite understand! If I feel better I'll come in by the front way, and pay another shilling—that's only fair."

"You needn't do that if you'll just explain what happened here."

The man went and pulled the curtain aside, and put his shoulder against the door. It burst open, and the light for a moment blinded Mr. Sleuth. He passed his hand over his eyes.

"Thank you," he said, "thank you. I shall get all right here."

Five days later Bunting identified the body of a man found drowned in the Regent's Canal as that of his late lodger; and the morning following, a gardener working in the Regent's Park found a newspaper in which were wrapped, together with a half-worn pair of rubber-soled shoes, two surgical knives. This fact was not chronicled in any newspaper; but a very pretty and picturesque paragraph went the round of the press, about the same time, concerning a small box filled with sovereigns which had been forwarded anonymously to the Governor of the Foundling Hospital.

Mr. and Mrs. Bunting are now in the service of an old lady, by whom they are feared as well as respected, and whom they make very comfortable.

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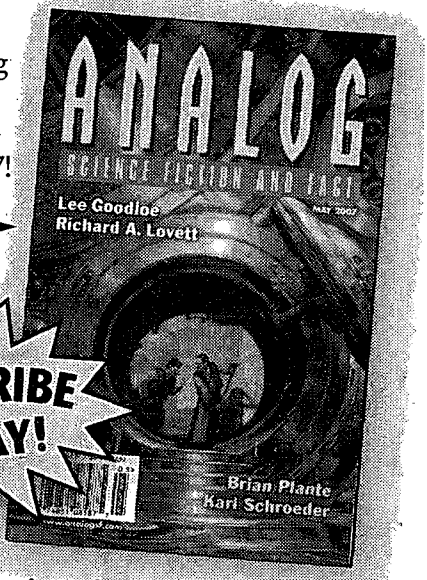
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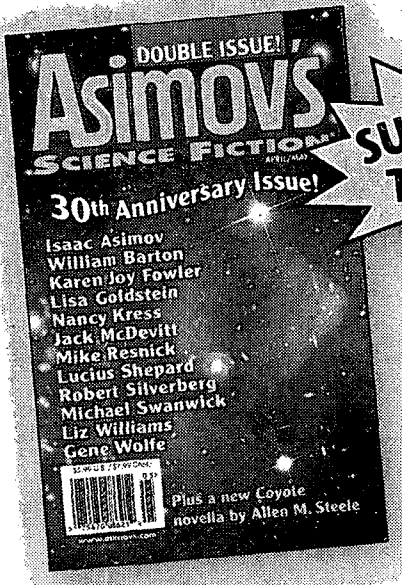
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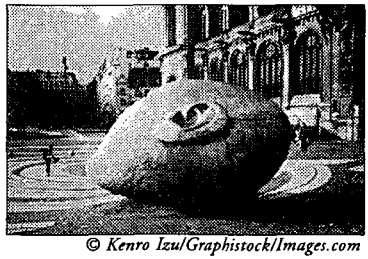
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THE LIES AND FALL OF PIERRE MENTEUR

JAMES E. SPITZER

Inspector Beauvais approached the boy, who stood nervously with his hands behind his back. "Good afternoon, Jacques."

"Good afternoon, Inspector."

A ball fell from Jacques's hands and rolled onto the courtyard.

"Did you see what happened to Pierre?"

The boy nodded and lowered his eyes. "He was standing in front of the church and we were just, er, playing like we do most days, and . . ."

"Even though the signs clearly state ball playing is against the law?" the inspector interrupted. "A wildly kicked ball could break the ancient stained glass windows in the Church of Saint Eustace. That is why it is prohibited."

Jacques grinned, "It would take a player from the Orange League to kick a ball that far."

Inspector Beauvais frowned, "Regardless, the law is the law. Yesterday, when I caught you both playing, Pierre denied any wrongdoing, saying, 'If I am lying may a thousand tigers tear me apart.' And last week he said, 'If I am lying may the waters of the Seine overflow and drown me where I stand.' I suppose he felt justified when none of those things happened."

Tears began to stream down Jacques's cheeks. "But today I'm afraid Pierre went too far."

Inspector Beauvais handed the boy his handkerchief. "How so?" he inquired.

"When the other *gendarme* accused him, he said, 'If I'm lying, may Saint Eustace crush me into a pulp.'"

"And that's when it happened?" the inspector asked.

Jacques looked up at the headless statue over the door and nodded.

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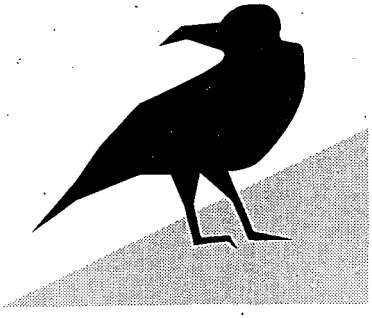
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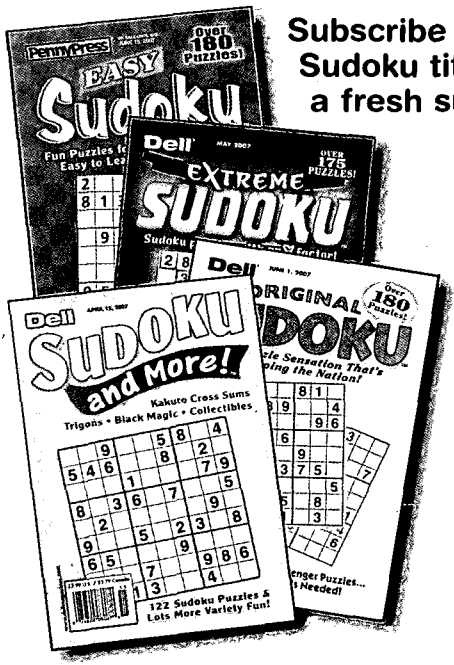
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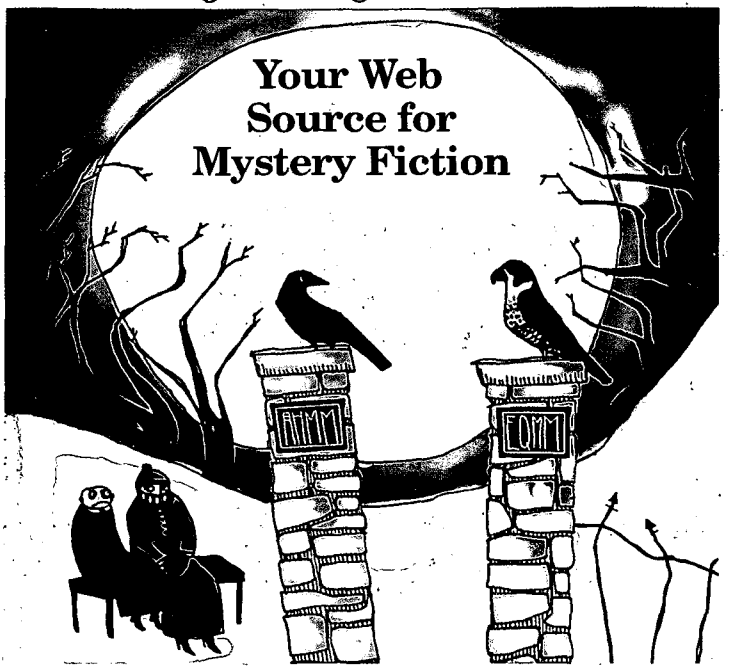
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